

# HERMES' PORTAL



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Issue n° 11

February 2004



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## HERMES' PORTAL

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# News from the Line

## Editor: February 2004

by David Chart

It's been a while since my last news update, so quite a lot has happened. Unfortunately from the perspective of this article, most of what has happened has been Fifth Edition stuff that I can't really talk about yet.

However, *Sanctuary of Ice* finally came out, rather behind schedule, followed by *Faerie Stories*. *Living Lore* is at the printers, and may well be shipping to distributors as you read this, and the next release, *Cause and Cure*, is ready as well. In short, the remaining Fourth Edition pipeline is all in hand, and releases should stay at one per quarter until Fifth Edition comes out at the end of the year.

Which brings us back to Fifth Edition. I finished my work on the last Fourth Edition books some time ago, so apart from administration, I've only been working on Fifth Edition. Fifth Edition is currently in its fourth round of playtesting, which means, I suspect, that Fifth Edition has already had more formal playtesting than all previous editions put together. There shouldn't be many problems like the Perdo Imaginem or combat worries in Fourth Edition, but I'm sure there'll be something important that only gets spotted when the book has been printed and released; that's just the way things go.

The changes and revisions have now settled down enough that I'm starting to talk to people about writing Fifth Edition supplements, in the hope of keeping quarterly releases going once the new edi-

tion has got everyone excited about the game. As I mentioned before, we have changed policy on supplements for the new edition. Instead of waiting for proposals from fans, we are drawing up the projects we want to see done, and then talking to people with Ars Magica writing experience about working on them. I hope that this will produce a more logical sequence of releases, that cover the areas that people are most interested in.

I'm excited about what's happening with the game, and I think the current fans will also be pleased, along with, I hope, a lot of new ones.

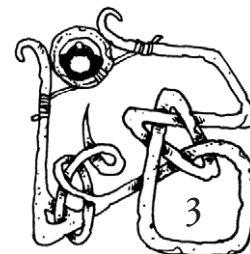
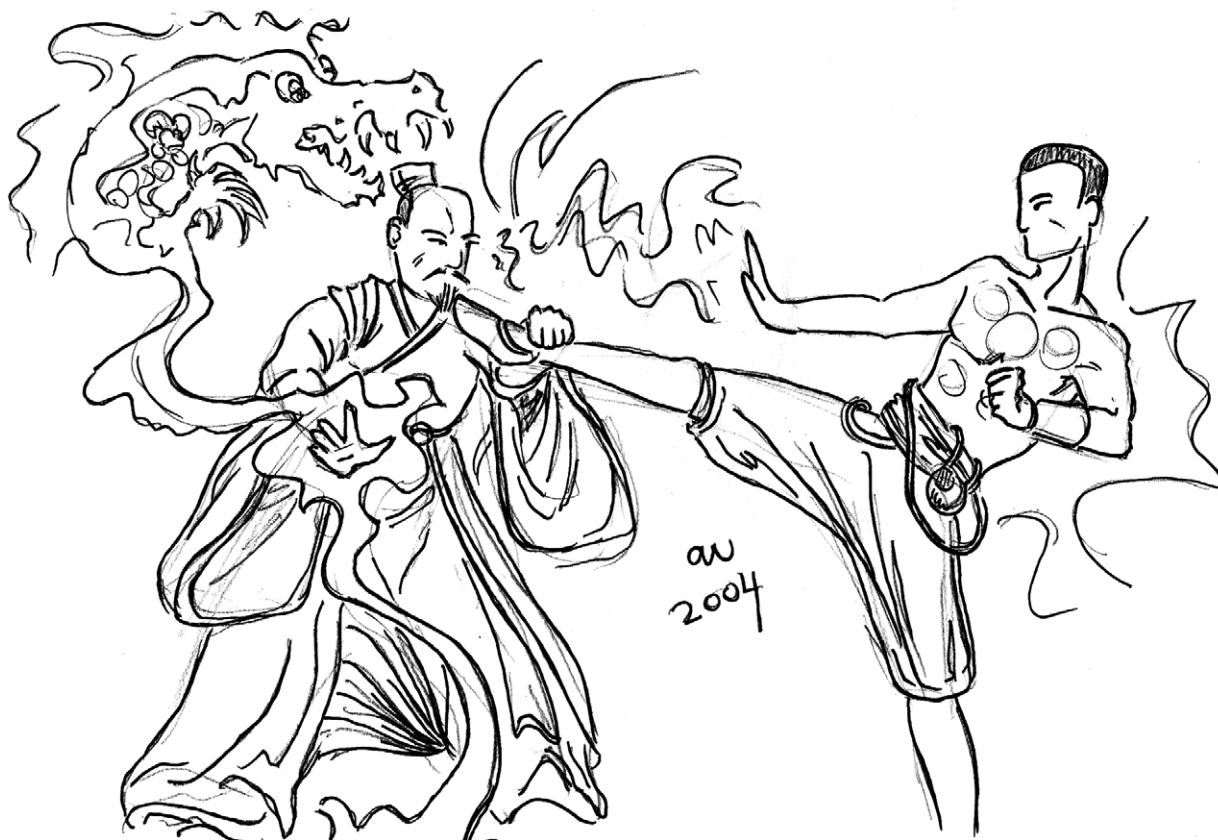
## Publisher's corner

Here in France, we are in the "Year of China", so naturally this issue continues the series opened in the previous issue, giving you the last four articles devoted to Mythic China. Now you're ready to send your players to conquer these distant lands and see what's hiding behind the Great Wall — countries full of easy-to-collect vis, or Gog and Magog?

But for those who are too cowardly or too lazy to head for such great adventures, this issue still offers enough food for thought: new spells, new ways to undertake discoveries in your lab, and new mysteries based on the study of History.

Otherwise, in a not-so-distant-future, there will be a free special issue for long-term subscribers (i.e. those of you who have bought at least ten issues). I already have a clear picture of what will appear in this issue, now I need the time to write it!

Next issue should be ready before the end of May, and Abelard will come back!







# Mythic Cathay: Taoism

by Timothy Ferguson

**T**aoism, although influenced by Indian philosophy, is China's indigenous religion. Although early Taoism was theologically uncluttered and emphasised acting without planning, by the Sung dynasty the folk-religion, out of which both Taoism and Confucianism had arisen, had consumed it. Taoism was divided into clusters of religious communities, each of which had a slightly different theology.

Taoism, in game terms, indicates what Europe might have become if not for three homogenising factors. Lacking pressure from the Church, polytheism and magic maintain their presence. Lacking the aggressive expansion of the Church and Hermetic Order, pagan teaching institutions flourish and continuity of knowledge allows refinement of their exceptional talents. Lacking Bonisagus, a robust, secular style of magic does not develop, so the Chinese schools retain their religious nature and focus on methods of achieving immortality.

Many of the abilities of Taoists will be familiar to those using *Ars Magica* supplements. The Chinese folk religion, from which Taoism descends, was the equivalent of Shamanism, although the wu, its practitioners, might have also practiced werebearism. Different branches of Taoism focus on charm-making, summoning and alchemy, and have techniques superior to those found in the West. Unlike their Western counterparts, however, Chinese practitioners are unable to produce novel effects, since their practices are religious and their deities active.

The Way, Tao, is the transcendent underlying principle. It was expressed as a series of doctrines, called the hun-tun, by the Gods to Lao-tzu. He taught the hun-tun to Chang T'ien-shih. Chang's dis-

ciples, now hsein (Taoist immortals), also trained followers and each school (p'ai) claims descent from one of these Masters.

## P'ai: Schools and styles of Taoist practice

Taoism is a religion which, rather than dividing into heretical sects, separates into competing schools, which often recognize each other's value, even if they quibble about which is more prestigious. Schools can be described by the intensity with which their teachings focus on three areas: talismanic magic, mysticism, and alchemy. Most schools combine the three, but emphasise one.

The most prestigious Taoist school during the game period is the Mao Shan Shang-ch'ing. Since a second, shadowy sect of suspectedly-black magicians also takes its name from a mountain (shan) called Mao, this group is most easily referred to — by a translation of the latter half of its name — as the Great Purity school. Although the Great Purity School declined under the Yuan Dynasty, during the late Sung each of the other great Taoists schools was deeply influenced by its key text, the Ta-tung Chen-ching. When considering the three key areas of Taoist practice, this article will use the Great Purity School's beliefs as its frame of reference.

### Talismans

Talismans are written charms, but to understand their power, players need to be familiar with mystical Chinese attitudes to writing. The earliest Chinese word for writing referred to divinationary blocks. The word for scriptures, ching, is a homophone of the word for road, which is another way of saying Tao. All words are magical, because they are essential to the things they name, but also because certain words, the ching, grew spontaneously out of the formation of the universe, uttered by the Primordial

### Taoism in Brief

Lao Tzu's initial work, the Tao Te Ching, is all but unreadable in its original form, since the ideographic alphabet he used does not include many of the building blocks of the modern sentence. Literally, the first line translates as "Tao tao'd not tao" and then it becomes even more obscure. What follows is the best gloss of thousands of years of obscure anti-scholastic philosophy that could fit into this article.

### Tao?

The word Tao appears in descriptions of all Chinese religions, including Christianity. Different religions mean different things by Tao, and within each religion the word is used in varying contexts. Although it translates very badly into English, the Tao, when spoken of by Taoists, can be thought of as the underlying rationale, as Nature or Natural Law, as the Spontaneous Causer of Things, as the primal unity. The word doesn't always refer to the Way, it can also refer to other ways of doing things, and to the visible effects of the Way.

### This is not the Tao you expect.

The following descriptions of Taoist practice are derived from academic works completed by skilled sinologists. A lot of it will look unfamiliar, even to readers with some interest in Taoism, because the discipline has undergone a historiographic shift within the last decade. A lot of the "Taoism" peddled in English literature is orientalist, that is, it takes advantage of Western ignorance or ill-definition to project what the author is seeking upon ancient Chinese sources. This section tries to present a vision of Taoism, in the limited space available, in accord with modern scholarship in English on Taoism. I'd encourage readers to become familiar with modern academic sources on Taoism, especially if they are fortunate enough to speak French, the language of cutting-edge sinological theology. This article is based, primarily, upon *Taoist Meditation: The Mao-Shan Tradition of Great Purity* by Isabelle Robinet translated by Pas and Giradot.



Breath. Ching underlie reality and give it structure: the translation of books from ephemeral to physical states — from light, through clouds, through golden letters on jade slates, to mortal books — orders the universe. Talismanic magic is the magic of these special words.

Contracts, or fu, play an important role in talismanic magic. Each ching contains fu, and these are used as authority to create writs that bind natural forces or the shen that underlie these forces, compelling them to obey instructions from the holder of the writ. These writs have also come to be called fu. Writs can be carved or painted, but writing them on cloth or paper, in black or red ink, allows them to be carried conveniently. Folksier magicians scourge themselves and write fu in blood, or simply write the characters invisibly in the air. Since fu are written in



Chinese to exacting formulae, duelling magicians can often tell what charm their rival is beginning to prepare.

## Alchemy

Chinese alchemy concentrates on the quest for immortality, and takes two forms, internal and external. External alchemy uses herbs and minerals in attempts to extend the lifespan. Chinese pharmacology is far superior to that of contemporary Europeans, since it works toward immortality by curing one problem at a time, but certain drugs, usually containing jade or cinnabar, are rumoured to purge all causes of death from the body. Since it is obvious to the Chinese that people taking most immortality drugs die faster, external alchemy loses favour to internal alchemy.

Internal alchemy nurtures pockets of energy that reside in each organ, to maintain their health. Organs are nurtured in different ways by each school. Common practices include meditation, dietary prohibitions, physical exercises, sexual activity or inactivity, and prayer. By keeping the organs healthy death can be delayed, but internal alchemy's highest adepts can also purge all causes of death from their bodies.

## Mysticism

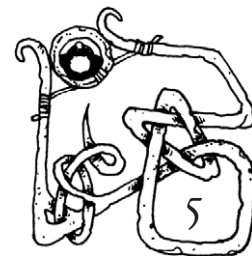
Mysticism is the worship and commanding of spirits. The Great Purity school places its greatest emphasis on mysticism, so much so that the energy pockets within the body are seen as spirits, to be propitiated much as the gods are. Skilled mystics can spirit-travel, visiting the corners of the Earth and the courts of Heaven, and can visualise places which are imaginary, but are real, rather than fantastic. The method of worshipping spirits, the power to command them, and vivid descriptions that guide visualization of true places comes from the scriptures, the ching.

### The Five Agents and the Five Organs

Taoists believe existence is maintained by five active principles, which cycle within all things. Each agent is linked with an element, a direction, a bodily organ, a colour, a season, a spirit, a planet, a mountain, a cereal, a true place and an article in every other category imaginable. To Taoist mystics, visualization of the internal organs is vital, because the organs are linked to the agents, and allow a worshipper to manipulate their currents and visit their true places. Unhealthy Taoists, in most schools, simply can't perform their rituals correctly, because their connection to the agents is impaired. Many early Taoist texts teach hygiene and medicine, since Taoists are meant to live separate from others, and need to be able to tend their own illnesses.

## Learning The Ching, or Scriptures

The ching were made manifest by the Primordial Breath, then transmitted from god to god until they were revealed to humans. These humans, enlightened by the ching, became immortals and founded schools







to train others who had the marks of potential immortality upon them. This descent of knowledge creates a spiritual hierarchy, and gives a new Taoist a place within the cosmos. To accept a student is much like accepting an adopted child: to become a student is much like being adopted.

To transmit a scripture, the master and apprentice meditate facing one another. Between them lie the ritual offerings usual as thanks for the transmission of the ching. These vary by scripture, being symbolically linked to the ching's contents, and are sacrifices to the gods who first taught that particular scripture to a human. In return, the student learns the "jewel names", or true names, of these gods, which allows him to ask their assistance and borrow some of their authority. He is taught an Earthly manifestation of the ching which is in Heaven.

As they descend, the ching increase in complexity. Initially a very simple diagram, which represents the workings of the cosmos, at each stage of descent explanation is added, bulking out the ching, so that the earthly copy can appear complex. For the rest of his life, the new student uses these accretions in the ching to discover the meaning of the initial, simple symbol. As the adept comes to understand the ching, they learn to unify disparate things.

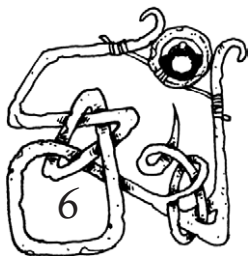
Each ching is protected by jade youths and maidens. These spirits will obey the command of the Taoist who has the ching but will depart temporarily each time the Taoist is impious. If they feel the Taoist is utterly degenerate they abandon him, and the ching either rises back up to Heaven, or is consumed in a ball of spiritual flame.

### Making a fool of yourself

Never mention game terms near people who speak Chinese. Each sound has different meanings depending on tone and dialect. "Ching" for example, is the Anglicization of both "scripture" and "semen". A running gag amongst restaurateurs is that "lucky dragon" is regularly mispronounced "(expletive meaning having sex with) apricot". That's why Hermetic magi can use apricots as spell foci (+1 to affect dragons).

## Chu: vocal magic

The chu are lengthy rituals — recitations of the ching — which are similar to western summoning, except that purification rituals, many of which take days, must be performed in advance of them. These exercises include correcting posture, clearing the mind of all thoughts, visualising internal organs or watching spiritual breaths enter and leave the body as coloured clouds. These preparations also include washing with water into which a talisman has been dipped, massaging the face in auspicious ways, making Buddhist-derived hand gestures, and grinding the teeth. Many schools suggest the use of fortifying drugs, either tablets or incense smoke. Following the preparations, the rituals are relatively brief.



Taoists perform magic by invoking spirits, using the jewel names found in the ching. Their prayers usually begin with a name, a description and a biography of the spirit to be summoned, so that the Taoist can visualise it properly. The Taoist then chants a summons, then makes a request, usually to borrow some of the powers of the spirit. The spirit complies to recompense the Taoist for their faith. Alternatively, the same technique can be used to banish demons. This allows the Taoist to cure most types of physical infirmity, including ageing, blindness and paralysis.

Chu are magical words, but every sound names something, and so any sound can be a magical word. This underlies Chinese attitudes to magical music, which has the power to alter the world, and to meditation by breathing, where the sounds of different ways of inhaling are the jewel names of internal organs. It also explains why Taoists grind their teeth. The sound is the name of a heavenly bell, and banishes malign influences.

## Transformations and invisibility

Skilled adepts are able to transform themselves into a wide variety of forms, but most of these are subtle and of little value in most roleplaying scenarios. Even those yet to transcend sometimes develop the ability to take other shapes, but this practice is more strongly present amongst the fang shih and other schools of Taoism. The five shapes usual for those who recite the Shen-chou Ching, a Greater Purity text, are light, cloud, water, fire and draconic. In light form the adept is invisible and cannot be harmed. In cloud form they can travel terrific distances quickly. In water or fire form they are immune to these elements and can become one with them. In dragon form they affect the weather. Practising these transformation assists in the transformation of the mortal body into the immortal body.

Another Greater Purity text describes a formula of meditation and ingestion of talismans which, if performed for many years, allows the adept to become invisible by facing the seasonal point on the horizon, swallowing another talisman and making a small dam of soil. Similar techniques allow invisibility by becoming light, hiding and travelling within the earth, becoming wood while in forests, bonding with the adept's shadow, or looking like a common person. Other texts allow transformation between genders and ages.

## Taoist Virtues

Taoist characters usually can't develop new magical workings by experimentation. Although they can develop a greater understanding of the ching they have, and for player characters it is usually comprehensive, they simply cannot develop powers that are not related in their ching. They can only develop new fields of ability by learning new ching, and this is all but impossible away from their master and the sacred mountain which houses their school.

Each school accesses different ching, granted by their immortal founder. It's this process of revealing new ching which makes a worthy patriarch for a new school. The Great Purity School grew out of older Taoist practices, and so its students have access to their ching, as well as the True Scripture of Great Profundity, which is the most highly thought of ching in the Sung period. It leads toward Heavenly Immortality, using the alchemical and talismanic practices of lesser schools to support its key method, visualisation. The True Scripture of Great Profundity, collected with a series of other minor Mao Shan revelations, is called the Scripture of Great Purity, and sections of this are the ching which player character Taoists usually begin with.

If designing another school of Taoists, the story-guide should select which of the three sections of the Storehouse of the Tao it focuses upon: mysticism; talismanic magic, alchemy. This, in turn, selects the key exceptional talent of the school; Unity; Ching Knowledge; Chinese Alchemy. All schools emphasise one of these skills, since each leads to a different sort of immortality; heavenly, earthly, underworldly. Although characters have all three skills, their scores in their non-dominant skills cannot rise above one-third of their dominant talent. The exception to this is Unity, which can rise to three times the score of the dominant skill. All schools have True Sight as a strong second ability. When purchasing Virtues, reduce the cost of the two non-dominant talents by one each.

The powers of Taoists described in this section assume continued access to a ching. They are derived from the philosophy of the Scripture of Great Purity, and are quantified for game purposes as Virtues: Hedge Magic describes more fully the idea of magical companions, but a person playing a Taoist basically uses the following cluster of virtues and flaws, and sacrifices their Hermetic magus slot. In exchange for their Hermetic magus slot, the character is given 10 additional points of virtues, which don't need to be balanced with flaws.

True Sight

This virtue costs +2, or +4 for travellers (see below). The True Sight power allows an adept to see spirits, demons, faeries, auras, and regio boundaries. It also allows them to view magical forces, which is important for talismanic and alchemical magic, and their enchanted internal organs, which is vital for mystical Taoists.

A variant of this ability allows mystics, or folk magicians, to voyage mentally, an ability similar to the shamanic Travel, but more effective. After ritual preparation, the adept chants a chu, then sends his mind inward, or outward depending on the school. His Travel score is stress die + Int + True Sight + Concentration if a folk magician. The roll is simple for mystical Taoists.

If he is attempting to visit a place he has visited before, he must total 9+ to arrive. Folk magicians who fail this roll wander lost in the psychic realm for

an hour, before returning to their body or rerolling. A botch (one dice) means he has lost track of where he is and cannot find the way back to his body. Mystic Taoists make an Intelligence check of 9+ to realise they are lost, then either awaken or reroll, only wandering an hour if the Int check fails. They cannot botch, since they never leave their bodies, as described in Unity, below.

If the wanderer is attempting to visit a place he does not know, he needs a strong physical or emotional connection to it, or if a mystical Taoist, the detailed description of how to get there provided in his ching. For this journey he needs to roll 12+ to arrive successfully. Failure indicates he is lost. Folk magicians need to find their bodies again, as familiar places, but mystical Taoists believe they've not left their bodies, and so just resume consciousness if they wish.

Mystical Taoists regularly Travel to the four mountains at the edges of the Earth, and to the many Heavens. This allows them to search the barbarian lands for fu, treasures of the spirit, and the essences of the directions, which they need to ingest regularly, so that they can cease depending on the five cereals. It also helps them Unify their inner gods, as described below.

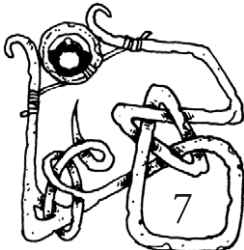
If the character is trying to visit the lands beyond the edges of the Earth, one of the Heavens or the Underworld, travel is more difficult, requiring a roll of 15+ and a connection, physical, emotional or scriptural. If a traveller becomes lost, he wanders for six hours before realising it. A botch (three dice) and the wanderer is lost.

The time it takes a traveller to reach their destination varies by the success of their roll.

| Roll  |                             | Time taken |
|-------|-----------------------------|------------|
| Earth | Past the Edges of the Earth |            |
| 12-13 | 15-16                       | 4 hours    |
| 14-15 | 17-18                       | 2 hours    |
| 16-17 | 19-20                       | 1 hour     |
| 18-19 | 21-22                       | 20 minutes |
| 20-21 | 23-24                       | 5 minutes  |
| 22+   | 25+                         | 1 minute   |

While the spirit of a magician is absent, his body appears to be a fresh corpse. Unless other precautions are taken, the empty bodies of folk magicians are sometimes possessed by spirits. Greater Purity Taoists already believe that every organ is possessed by a spirit, and those 38 keep intruders at bay provided the adept has a Unity score of 3 or more.

True Sight can be increased by a season of extra-corporeal excursions, or meditation upon the viscera. For each season so spent, the Taoist gains one experience point. Such a season, although spent living as a Taoist should, does not generate a point of Unity experience, as described later, since the visualization exercises differ.





## Unity

The Unity Virtue has a value of +3 for Great Purity Taoists, but may be lower if the Taoist has a less comprehensive ching.

One of the main goals of Great Purity meditation is to unify the spirits which inhabit each organ of the body with their corresponding heavenly actors, then unify the spirits of the body into a single, androgynous being, Emperor One. The closer an adept draws to Oneness, the greater their ability to manifest magical powers.

### Mechanics of Unity

Adepts begin with a Unity score of 1. For each season in which they sequester themselves away from others and fulfil the meditational duties outlined in their ching, their Unity increases by one experience point. Experience from other sources cannot be spent on Unification. Certain effects cannot be attempted until Unification reaches a certain level, and some ching, if followed, grant powers that are unrelated to Unification, which are simulated by Virtues.

A character achieving a new level of Unification should return to the Sacred Mountain to be given further instruction by their master. Those who do not return can develop experience toward the next

### Taboo acts

Different ching relate different taboos. The following taboos are game variants of Great Purity School taboos.

#### Loss of one or two levels

- Breaking dietary laws
- Failing to perform the daily routine of a Taoist for a period of longer than a week
- Failing to hoard your sexual energy (not followed by many other Taoist schools)

#### Loss of two or three levels

- Deliberately polluting your body.
- Eating the five cereals, if Unity is higher than 6. At this level of Unity, adepts should subsist on the sublimated breaths of the sun, moon, agents and deities. See the "Travel" talent within the "True Sight" virtue.
- Failing in your duties to your master or apprentice.

#### Loss of all unity

- Extreme moral failures, such as training as a sage or Hermetic magician
- Ceasing to sincerely be a Taoist

#### Permanent loss of all unity

- Breach of contract with the gods, for example, sacrilege against the revealer of one's ching

**Permanent loss of your own Unity, the removal of Unity from your ancestors for up to seven generations, and ill-fortune on your descendants for another seven**

- Revealing a ching to someone unworthy, or in an incorrect manner



level of Unity, but do not earn the final experience point until their master gives them new ching. Additional sources of new ching are the distant lands beyond the four edges of the world. In ancient times sages travelled to the edges of the world, finding, creating or learning new fu, then returning to China with fresh ching, founding new schools. Young characters may venture to the distant lands to seek traces of the ancient seers. Elderly characters may travel to the four quarters to become worthy of new ching that allow them to reach the uppermost levels of Unity, become immortals (hsien) and found schools. Certain adventures in the distant lands grant automatic insight into the oneness of things, and allow immediate increases in Unity.

Unity is diminished when Taoists break the taboos inherent in the lifestyle detailed by their ching, or when they suffer injuries that impair their organs, and thereby diminish their link to the Five Agents. Unity lost through illness returns once the sickness is cured.

The adept's Unity score is added to all Magic Resistance Rolls, Soak Rolls and Stamina rolls which resist poisoning or illness. The adept's Unity score is subtracted from all ageing rolls. Although the Unity modifier is not cumulative with other sources of supernatural longevity, many Taoists use alchemical preparations to boost their Stamina, which delays the onset of ageing.

The dependence of Greater Purity adepts upon visualisation limits their development of Unity. Although their Unity score can exceed their True Sight score, when used in a formula, adepts use the lesser of the two. This symbolises the importance, within this school, of being able to see one's organs, journey to the quarters and heavens, and consume the essential breaths of stars, deities and agents. These activities make Unity possible and distort the body, allowing it supernatural abilities. Other schools have similar limiting factors.

### Calling down gods

The Taoist Adept, through creative imagination, sends his mind to the corners of the Earth, while simultaneously drawing the inhabitants of magical places to the Taoist's retreat, or into the Taoist's body. This allows him to make requests of the spirits, and they usually grant these, because the possession of a ching implies a contract between the Taoist and the gods who passed the ching to mortals.

Great Purity Taoists have the tremendous advantage that their ching states that just about every important god is resident in one of the Taoist's vital organs, which means one or more of them is almost certain to have a spirit that can grant your wishes under their control. The limiting factor for Greater Purity Taoists isn't the lack of jewel names, which cripple other traditions, it's a lack of Unity sufficient to reconcile the Taoist's desire, the inner god and the outer god.

A player calling down a deity should check the metabestiary article (see page 22) and create a



summonee, then check it with the storyguide. Remember that if they want a shen that can command a second creature, it needs to be at least 5 Might more powerful than its potential victim. If the character wants to draw along the immediate entourage of their spirit, their target number is 1.5 times its initial Might. A Greater Purity Taoist cannot effectively summon a being whose Might is more than 5 times the Taoist's Unity score.

A Taoist prepares to call down gods as he would either for performance of a chu or for prolonged meditation. For game purposes, Greater Purity Taoists usually prefer chu for those gods tied closely to the Scripture of Great Profundity, and use meditation for other shen. This is because each ching contains contracts with the gods, fu, which allow the ching's holder to call for assistance. Other schools prefer to use fu exclusively.

### Mechanics of summoning

Before summoning, the Taoist needs to meditate. This requires a Concentration check of 12+ and takes a small space of time. In the case of the Greater Purity sect, this takes a few minutes for young characters and is increasingly rapid as they develop greater interconnectedness.

The Greater Purity Taoist's summoning total equals stress die + Stamina + True Sight (ability to visualize the Gods) + Unity (ability to harmonise with the gods) +10 which reflects use of the body as a perfect talisman, if summoning by meditation. This is the most powerful and versatile form of summoning available to Taoists, but summoning by chanting scriptures is a skill that develops more swiftly. Note that True Sight and Unity act as requisites for each other in the Greater Purity Sect, so effectively Mao Shan Taoists use stress die + Stamina +10 + double the lower of Unity and True Sight.

A called shen will allow a Taoist to borrow one of its powers for a period it deems suitable, for a purpose it deems suitable. This sometimes includes the authority of commanding its subordinates, which is used to banish demons by borrowing spiritual heavies from a Celestial army. Usually a shen will only offer a single power at any time, but this is not always the case. Shen tend to be generous, because the ching contain contracts that bind them to aid adepts, but if their abilities are used against the principles of Taoism, they punish the Taoist personally. Players should remember that shen are potent non-player characters, not spell effects, and although they are usually cordial, they can be unpredictable, demanding and obscure.

The Taoist must perform summoning privately. Even the great public rituals that become popular during the later Sung dynasty, theologically, exist only to isolate the summoning Taoist from distractions. If completed perfectly they make the Concentration check before summoning unnecessary.

### Transform

The Greater Purity Adept gains additional shapes in the following sequence: Shapechanging away from the human form requires extensive meditation after lengthy purification ceremonies. Transforming characters must make a Unity roll as indicated in the left column to successfully change. Unsuccessful transformations may halt partway between forms, or may not commence at all. They can be corrected by transforming back into human form. Fatalities from failed transformations are extremely rare.

#### Unity score

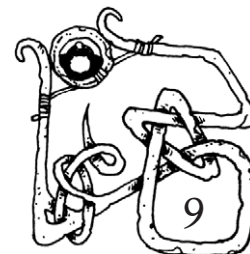
- |    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|----|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 5  | human: this is used to change back from other transformations. If the transformation was due to an outside force, such as a curse from another magician, the target number rises to the level of the spell effect. |
| 10 | light; can become invisible and intangible at will                                                                                                                                                                 |
| 15 | cloud; can travel "a thousand li in a day"                                                                                                                                                                         |
| 20 | fire; is immune to flame, can become flame                                                                                                                                                                         |
| 25 | water; can become water, cannot drown                                                                                                                                                                              |
| 30 | dragon; can control weather and fly to Heaven                                                                                                                                                                      |

Other ching have differing transformations, so other schools have different practices. Some, for example, practice invisibility by melding with the Earth, which also allows rapid travel. Others allow the Taoist to become young or old, male or female. Monkey apparently studied in a school that used transformation as its key ability. Although players might wish to have characters with abilities similar to Monkey's, he gains his transformative powers after illumination, and he became illuminated only because he was born of the World Egg, a unique origin.

### Talismanic Magic

Talismanic magic is a Virtue valued at +3, if the character's ching have a Comprehensiveness Value (see below) of 5 in all fields. Add 1 to the Virtue cost for each point of Comprehensiveness in a field equivalent to a Hermetic Form or Technique. Add +1 for each two points in a restricted field within a Hermetic Art. Subtract one for each point of comprehensiveness taken from the original 5. Players should not be allowed to reduce this value by removing fields of comprehensiveness, because so many are tempted to remove fields they'd not have used anyway. Greater Purity Taoists interpret their Ching in such a way as to cripple its talismanic uses (Comp 3, all fields. Value +1).

Fu are contracts with the gods, or, colloquially, magic charms of any type. These come from the ching initially, although some have escaped into folk wisdom, or into schools of folk magicians. Characters cannot design new fu, only use those that have been revealed to them by training, or, very rarely,





## Fu that accrue

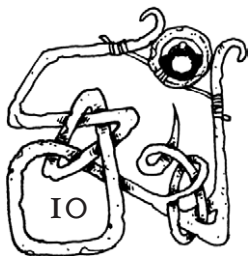
It's impossible to list the fu known by each school of Taoists in an article this size. Instead the following rules should be used:

If a character wants to know if he can perform a certain fu, the storyguide must first decide if it is either impossible or certain that a ching contains that fu. Storyguides can design ching explicitly if they wish. To do this they assign a number of Hermetic spell level equivalents, say 150, which the beginning character has access to. Virtues and Flaws reduce this pool by ten times their value. Fu cannot alter a character's history or grant Virtues which seem ridiculous. It's suggested that very few Hermetic Virtues or Flaws be duplicable with fu. If a ching does contain a fu, the character can attempt to create it.

Alternatively, the storyguide can allow the character's repertoire of fu to develop over time. If the storyguide feels that a ching might contain that fu, then the storyguide should assign a Comprehensive Value. This measures, on a scale of 1 to 10, the proportion of possible effects within the ching's field that the fu contains. The storyguide rolls against this value. On a botch, the character has fundamentally misunderstood their ching, and attempted a fu which is not related to their circumstances. If the roll misses by one, there is a similar effect, determined by the storyguide. See page 69 of *Ars Magica* for elaboration of "similar". Either a success or failure should be recorded by the storyguide, since that fu availability will be identical in future. Note that every Taoist who has the same ching has the same set of fu, so fu used by NPCs of the character's school are now available for him, and similarly those accessible to him are available to his masters.

Failing a roll that indicates similarity, a fu which does not contain a certain effect does not contain effects which are similar, as defined by page 69 of *Ars Magica*. A ching that doesn't allow you to summon the Old Demon General doesn't allow you to summon any other demon general either. A ching that doesn't let you paralyse opponents for a day won't let you paralyse them for a minute. Storyguides should strongly enforce this rule.

Greater Purity Taoists, strictly speaking, know vast numbers of fu. Generally however, they don't use them in a way players might find practical, since they interpret them mystically. For example, a Great Purity Taoist has discovered a fu which summons the Queen of the West. For a talismanic school magician that'd be such a powerful fu they'd use it only with trepidation. For a Great Purity Taoist, its a mnemonic that aids True Sight, allowing the adept to see the Queen in her realm, which corresponds to the spirit in the mystic's left kidney. This is reflected as an increase in Unity. Characters have many practical fu or high Unity scores, but not both, because the mindsets differ too broadly.



## Examples of fu in ching

A Taoist discovers a lost scripture called "Imbibing the Essences of the Moon", which has simple fu that let him see by moonlight, command fireflies and summon Swans of the Moon, which act as messengers. Since the storyguide has predefined the contents of this ching, he never rolls to see if it contains a fu.

Another Taoist increases his Purity and is rewarded, by his master, with access to a new ching, "The White Agent". The storyguide decides that it has a value of 5, on all matters linked to the white agent, except that it does not allow summoning of the spirits of the west. Hereafter the storyguide rolls a stress die whenever the character wants a fu that is related to metal, the west, the lungs, and other things corresponding to that agent. Whenever he succeeds or fails, the storyguide notes these limits, since they affect others using the ching. He also decides that on a botch, the character will attract the attention of the White Tiger of the West, a powerful demon who causes Autumn.

## Crafting fu

- Simple fu whose durations are longer than Diameter must be recorded. Usually these recordings are duplicated. For example, to cure illness a fu will be written twice on a single piece of paper, cut in two, then one will be worn while the other is ingested.
- No more than three simple fu can target a human at once, but a Taoist carrying more can select which will be active, on a round by round basis. They must declare which fu are active during the initial phase of the combat round. A character whose magic resistance fails to protect him from a hostile charm loses one of these slots to that effect and can't select to ignore it. Hermetic effects that distort the target may also take one of these slots. Complex fu may take one of these slots, but longevity charms do not.
- Particularly skilled sages are rumoured to be able to accept more active fu. At the storyguide's discretion, a new fu slot is gained when Ching Knowledge reaches 10, provided all fu come from that ching. Another slot appears with every 5 points of ability.
- A character cannot create fu whose totals are more than 5 times the value of either their True Sight or Ching Knowledge scores.
- Simple fu are not cumulative. Complex fu may be cumulative, at the storyguide's discretion.
- Unlike Western charms, fu can target places. Places can be affected by three fu, plus one for each level of wild aura, minus one for each level of civilised aura. If more than the maximum number of fu is present, then those with the highest totals are active.
- Fu are created individually. Although groups can use fu at the same time for the same

purpose, for example to attack an enemy, their magical abilities are not pooled: their attacks are handled separately.

- Although fu can create magical effects, they can't simulate those that are unique to the Hermetic Order. Most obviously, a charm cannot replicate the Aegis of the Hearth, although other warding effects are possible. Air spells are difficult for Chinese magi, since their cosmology has everything breathing essences, rather than "air".
- Fu that contain multiple effects take one season per effect to create.

- Talismanic Taoists don't use vis, however, at the storyguide's discretion, they sometimes require virtuous materials (as per *Hedge Magic*) to craft complex fu.
- A fu roll always produces a magical effect, because every sound is a name, as is every character. If a character does not botch his fu roll but fails to make his target level, his misdrawn fu has an unpredictable effect, selected by the storyguide, although this doesn't harm the Taoist. Some of these effects are invisible, because they effect distant objects, or make tiny changes in the character's surroundings.



found in the lands beyond the edges of the civilised world.

Fu come in two types, simple and complex. Simple fu have a single effect, duplicating a spell or virtue. These take the place of spellcasting in talismanic Taoism, where the rapid scribing of a writ, invisibly in the air, creates a hand gesture that has a magical effect. These fu last a brief period, and are little used by the Greater Purity sects, who use fu as mystic aids. In comparison, folk magicians prefer this sort of fu, although they often extend the duration by formalising the hand movement on paper. This also allows them to make a living selling charms.

Complex fu can take seasons to produce, and can have sophisticated, permanent effects. Generally, Greater Purity Taoists write fu on the solstice or equinox auspicious to their agent, after lengthy meditation, in beautiful weather. Other traditions are

more prolific, although the days of the agents make writing fu easier.

It should be noted that although Greater Purity Taoists use fu to assist their mediation and imaginative exercises, those fu are assumed in the True Sight and Unity abilities. A Greater Purity Taoist who, for example, draws on his foot to aid astral journeying does not use these rules. He simply makes his normal True Sight rolls.

## Alchemy

Internal Alchemy is a +2 Virtue if you have Mystic Understanding, a +3 Virtue if you have a Purity score and a +5 Virtue if you have both. The value of Purity rises if the starting character has access to more than 150 level equivalents of Transcendence effects, at the rate of +1 per ten levels.

### Fu Ease Modifiers

To make a complex fu requires a total of 12 on stress die + Int + Ching Knowledge + True Sight + aura, with the following modifiers: For simple fu, halve the sum of the modifiers and round up.

| Effect                                 | Ease factor Modifier                                   |
|----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| Alter a Characteristic                 | + (7 × alteration)                                     |
| Alter an Ability                       | + (3 × alteration)                                     |
| Add or remove a Virtue or Flaw effect  | + (7 × virtue or flaw cost)                            |
| Longevity charm*                       | + (2 × subtraction from roll for self, 4 × for others) |
| Simulate Hermetic spell                | + twice spell level                                    |
| Simulate Hermetic ritual*              | + twice spell level                                    |
| Multiple effects within same charm*    | sum effects, then multiply by number of effects        |
| Cap an Ability at current level        | +3                                                     |
| Rolls on a single Ability are always 0 | +14                                                    |
| Rolls on a single Ability always botch | +21                                                    |

#### Duration

|            |    |
|------------|----|
| Momentary  | -2 |
| Diameter   | -1 |
| Day        | +0 |
| Week       | +1 |
| Month      | +2 |
| Permanent* | +0 |

Simulated Hermetic spells still need a second duration. This second value represents how long the fu remains "charged" and available for use. For example, a Taoist who makes a fu which flings a sharpened rock needs to choose how far into the future that fu remains active. Unused charges, purchased below, are lost if the duration expires.

#### Number of Uses

|       |    |
|-------|----|
| One   | -1 |
| Two   | +0 |
| Three | +1 |

#### Preparation

|                                                        |                                                                                                                           |
|--------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Writing in the air                                     | +5                                                                                                                        |
| Writing rapidly on paper                               | +3                                                                                                                        |
| Using a prop, no other preparation                     | +3                                                                                                                        |
| Writing and using a prop, no other preparation         | +1                                                                                                                        |
| Rendered in a medium more permanent than paper         | +1 (wood) to +5 (jade)                                                                                                    |
| Meditation or mantra                                   | -1                                                                                                                        |
| Meditation, purification, recitation of chu            | -2                                                                                                                        |
| Auspicious equinox / solstice                          | -5                                                                                                                        |
| Meditation, self-mortification, blood used to write fu | - cumulative injury modifier, not performed by Great Purity. If injuries healed before fu is made, this modifier is lost. |

\*Always complex fu.





External Alchemy is a +1 Virtue if you are an assistant, a +2 Virtue if you are a master and a +3 Virtue if you have achieved grand mastery. Many alchemists also take social Virtues to reflect business ownership.

China has a pair of related alchemical traditions. Initially China's alchemists were similar to those of the West, enthusiastic prescribers of elixirs of dubious merit. After many Tang emperors died more quickly than was usual due to repeated doses of jade and cinnabar, this form's status was usurped by internal alchemy, which claims that the internal substances of the body can be recombined by meditation, lifestyle and exercise to allow immortality. External alchemists continue to exist and do a thriving trade in medicines, but few noblemen would be so foolish as to believe that their alchemist can sell them secrets which the Tang emperors could not buy.

## The Internal Alchemist

Internal alchemy is an underlying inspiration for the mystical practices of the Greater Purity sect, described above. The essential difference between internal alchemists and mystics is that one considers the frame as the living thing, filled with substances and structures which fuel vitality, while the other considers the body to be a frame filled with independently-alive sentiences. Greater Purity mystics don't use these Internal Alchemy rules — they instead use visualization and Unity to perform internal alchemy.

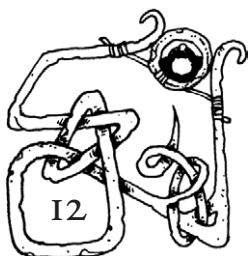
Internal alchemists are Ascetics similar to those found in the West, with the following exceptions. These rules are also a useful model for very early, all-but-secular, Taoists, who followed only the work of the Master, and not one of the explanatory schools. Such Taoists are all but inextant in Sung China, but players sometimes like a very uncluttered, cinematic Taoist character, and ascetics are suitable for this.

### Ascetics in brief

Ascetics must live within a restrictive set of taboos, and the storyguide rates their play on a scale of 1 to 6. This score represents the character's Purity. Purity is used in Transcendence, which allows the character to ignore the five agents, and Mystic Understanding, which allows them to feel the course of events. Ascetics begin with a Purity Score of 2, and can't alter this with experience points.

### Purity guidelines

- 0 Constantly lapses from ideals
- 1 Major lapses no more than weekly, and minor lapses no more than daily.
- 2 Major lapses no more than monthly, minor lapses no more than weekly
- 3 Major lapses no more than seasonally, minor lapses no more than monthly
- 4 Major lapses no more than annually, minor lapses no more than seasonally



- 5 Never has major lapses, and has minor lapses no more than annually
- 6 Never lapses

To transcend, the character selects an effect on the Transcendence Table, meditates, then sums a stress die + Stamina + True Sight + Purity + Meditation Bonus + Aura Bonus and compares it to the transcendence table. Transcendences last until the ascetic gives in to the mundane needs of the body, or invokes another transcendence effect. To simulate this, the character must make a Stamina roll of 12+ every 12 hours or give into the needs of the body. Add 1 to the difficulty factor for every twelve hours after the first since the character has eaten or slept.

### Transcendence Table

- 12+ Walk on water, ignore weather, ignore the weight of a single object, ignore a campfire sized flame.
- 15+ Heal a Body level. Exist for a day without sustenance
- 18+ Allow one Agent to flow through you harmlessly. Reduce your body's weight to feathery lightness and walk on air. Breathe underwater or under the earth.
- 24+ Allow magical energy of all five agents to flow through you harmlessly. Allow weapons of all five agents to flow about you harmlessly.
- 27+ Allow all five Agents, in all manifestations, to flow through you harmlessly. Become a being of light (and become invisible). Turn into a cloud and travel a thousand miles in moments. Turn into earth and tunnel rapidly to other locations.
- 36+ Become a sun and rise into the Heavens (this retires the character from the game).

### Meditation Table

| Modifier   | Action |
|------------|--------|
| None       | -12    |
| 1 round    | -9     |
| 2 minutes  | -6     |
| 10 minutes | -3     |
| 1 hour     | 0      |
| 6 hours    | +1     |
| 24 hours   | +3     |

Unlike Western Ascetics, Taoists are permitted to take breaks during long meditations, for refreshment.

- The Internal Alchemist is penalized by the presence of the Civilized Aura, or Wild auras which are tainted by the work of sages (including Hermetic magi), but is assisted by all other auras.
- The character's Purity score is added to all rolls on Survival, Awareness, Concentration, True Sight and Athletics.
- Internal alchemists, unlike Western ascetics, are not required to withdraw from human contact. They are instead required, in their dealings, to follow the Tao. Their ability to follow the Way determines their Purity score. They

tend to withdraw to the wilds, meditate, eat temperately and, by the Sung period, abstain from sex. Earlier schools emphasized sex as a useful method for balancing the yin and yang, but this led to scandals and notoriety in the distant past.

- Taoists transcend much as Western ascetics do, although their description of the process differs in two ways. If the character is part of a school of internal alchemists, after achieving each new level of purity the character should travel to their master and learn a superior series of exercises. If the character's Purity falls, they do not forget these drills and can recommence them once it rises again.
- Internal alchemists can only select effects from the Transcendence Table that have been explained to them by their master. A beginning Taoist learns the equivalent of 150 levels of Hermetic spells, as selected by the storyguide. These effects are always focused on the body of the Alchemist. They gain extra effects as their master demonstrates new techniques to them.
- Unlike Western ascetics, Taoists subtract their Purity scores from all Social skills. They also subtract it from uses of the Guile Ability. They add their score to Magic Resistance rolls if they wish, and to all Stamina rolls against poison and disease. They subtract treble their Purity score from their Ageing Roll. Many Chinese practice minor austerities, to have a Purity score of 1, which increases their lifespan remarkably.
- Mechanically, Taoist Mystic Understanding works as the Intuitions Virtue does, save that the Purity score of the Taoist reduces the difficulty factor of the Intuition roll. When the character's Purity score is 6+, their talent works automatically. Taoists don't have a supernatural source of information, they have an instinctive sense of what the next step should be.
- Players of Ascetic Taoists can ask only one question "What is the correct thing to do now?" They are not limited to three questions per topic, as Western ascetics are. Storyguides worried by this ability can make the answers they give vague, symbolic, or excessively detailed or too broad, but should note that this ability provides a moral compass. It can't help a character reach goals, because to have goals is immoral, and there are times when it will answer "prepare for the joy of waking from the fever that is life". To ask for a direction and then not take it is an impure act.
- The moral compass of the Tao constricts what a player character can do. The Tao-enlightened are virtuous without knowing that they're ethical. The character must be played as both benevolent and unaware. True Taoists are

good by accident, since they have forsaken planning entirely. Planning is an impure act.

Rules for External Alchemy follow on page 14.

### Ability scores for Taoists

Like other mystical companions, Taoists have 10 points of free Virtues, up to ten points of Virtues balanced by Flaws, 41 experience points preset in Abilities, a score of 5 in Speak (own language) and 10 + age experience points which the player spends as they wish. The player also sacrifices his Hermetic magus slot to play a mystical companion.

A Greater Purity Taoist has the following scores:

Free Virtues: True sight +4 (traveller), Unity +3, Limited Talismanic Magic +1, Limited External Alchemist +1, Secret Hiding Place +1 (The regio in which the character's master lives, probably in Mao Shen)

Usual: Wise one, but not compulsory.

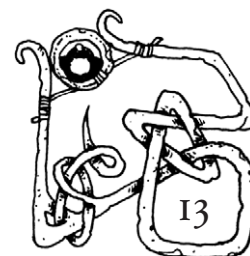
Ability (initial score): True sight 4, Unity 2, Alchemy 1, Ching Knowledge 1, Scribe Chinese 3, Speak own dialect 5, Taoist Theology 4, Concentration 2, Survival 2, Medicine 2, Folk Ken 2, Athletics 1, Swim 1

Other ching, and other schools, exist, and the virtue packages for them vary by chief ability. Many lack Travelling. The Great Purity School's members are comparatively powerful summoners. Other schools, however, have a stronger talismanic focus, and therefore can craft a wider variety of charms, or have a more intense alchemical focus, and so know many more recipes. None, however, have flexibility equivalent to the Western Virtues "Greater Alchemy" or "Craft Charm".

### Death

Death has several causes, in Taoist belief. At the creation of the embryo, knots are tied in the viscera, and these cause eventual death unless removed by purification rituals. Three evil spirits, the Three Worms, reside within the body and draw it toward death, so that they can be released. These must be expelled by summoning or alchemy. Finally, a group of gods tracks the good and ill a person does, and adds or subtracts from their lifespan, to reward or punish.

At death, the degree of purity of the Taoist determines his fate. Those of great merit, but little skill, become governors of the underworld, and continue their studies toward immortality. Those of greater merit do not die, but cannot live in the Heavens, since they retain bodies: these remain in earthly paradises, continuing toward heavenly immortality. These paradises are regiones upon or within sacred mountains. Heavenly immortals leave the body behind, ride astride dragons and command the stars. Their state is the goal of Great Purity Taoists.







# Mythic Cathay: Chinese External Alchemy

by Timothy Ferguson

External alchemy is one of the few Chinese magical practices where experimentation is possible. That being said, characters in their early twenties, beginning alchemists, are limited to formulae that their masters have taught them during apprenticeship. Although their skill score continues to increase, unimpeded, the range of effects they can produce is strictly limited until they are given or develop a broad pharmacopoeia. Once this occurs, they become similar to Western Natural Magicians, but lack the Spellcrafting skill.

## Alchemists' assistants

Most young alchemists will work for a master who sells his potions from a store, hawks while travelling the cities of the empire, or serves a wealthier patron. Alchemical assistants have the Medicine ability and can perform those works that they've regularly assisted their master to perform in the past. In consultation with the storyguide the player should choose those effects his master is most likely to have used. He knows the correct formula for (Alchemy + Intelligence) potions, and gains an additional formula each time his alchemy score improves.

## Minor potions

The formulae an apprentice knows may include standard potions, but minor potion formulae are

often more useful to beginning characters, since they are easier to produce, and require no vis. To create a minor potion requires one hour's work, two if you need to gather the wild ingredients or run about apothecaries with a shopping list. This produces a single dose, whose potency is determined after it is swallowed.

The alchemist rolls a stress die + Intelligence + Alchemy (+ Alchemy bonuses if any). If the roll is 9+, then the imbiber adds (Alchemy + any alchemy bonuses)/2 to one of the following list of abilities for the next full day. If the roll fails the potion has no effect. For rolls of zero, roll two botch dice plus one for each potion the character has consumed today beyond the first. For botches, subtract the maker's Alchemy score for a full day. Double botches usually aren't fatal, but are left to the storyguide's discretion. Drinking two potions that affect the same skill or talent, in the same day, automatically produces a botch. With an appropriate formula, an alchemist can also create potions which reduce the following abilities by the maker's Alchemy score. The difficulty factor is again 9+.

### Minor potions table

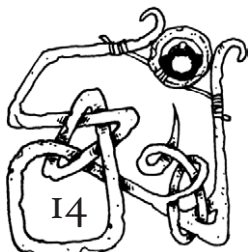
Awareness  
Animal Handling (is fed to the animal)  
Chirurgy (applied directly to wounds)  
Carouse  
Concentration  
True sight  
Survival  
Visions (half the bonus to your Visions talent is subtracted from all mundane perception rolls)

Many non-player character alchemists never train beyond this degree, and become pharmacists. This is also the degree achieved by most mystical Taoists, who use drugs to help them Travel, increase their Stamina and cure illnesses.

## Master alchemist

A master alchemist has developed the resources and pharmacology to create potions of almost any type, like a Western alchemist. This status is sometimes inherited from the character's master. Many apothecaries are family businesses, which sons inherit. Alternatively the character can purchase or otherwise acquire one of the powerful ching which relates the formulae of the profession. If the storyguide wishes, this corpus can be broken up into separate ching, which then become story goals. These writings may include the formulae for creating magic items. These rules, slightly altered, are used for other potentially-magical crafts, like sword-making.

Note that just because a character has a formula, does not mean they have the ingredients necessary to produce a magical drug or device. Although a thriving trade in ingredients bustles in most major cities, truly spectacular results sometimes require expensive, distant pieces of dangerous animals. A rule of







thumb is to scale a city by its Civilised aura, and state that replacement ingredients are available, at steep prices, for effects with a Hermetic equivalent of  $5 \times$  aura

To move from assistant to master is one of the great goals in the life of an alchemist. There's the possibility that a master will refuse to disclose his secrets, will replace the apprentice, or will give his pharmacopoeia to only one of his apprentices. In return, the temptation to murder a master reluctant to retire has occasionally proven irresistible. Some masters will, however, poison themselves, seeing their weight loss as a sign their matter is 'lightening'. Storyguides should carefully plan a character's move from assistant to tradesman.

## Grandmaster Alchemist

This class of alchemist has developed sufficient control over the Agents that they can purify their bodies, and other objects, making them less vulnerable to age. These abilities are simulated by the Transformation and Longevity powers of Western alchemists. The paramillennial fixation on longevity in the Chinese tradition increases the Alchemy bonus for this potion to +9, provided the character can procure substantial quantities of Virtuous Jade, Virtuous Cinnabar, or similar rarities.

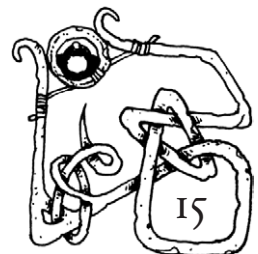
Few street alchemists are initiates of this degree, although virtually all of them know some sort of "potion of longevity", usually charlatanous. Many masters have a general formula, which they brew for themselves, but calculate its lab total as if it were designed for another. One of these potions is usually implied as part of the payment by a master for the services of his apprentice. The most skilled can develop a personal formula for themselves or others. Developing your own formula demonstrates, using your body as an example, how the process of coordinating the Agents works, and allows the use of transformation potions that have requisites.

## Material Science

The Chinese are technologically superior to the Europeans in many fields during the Sung period. Although the thrust of Chinese cultural development has, for a time, subsided, the discoveries of the past allow Chinese alchemists to produce substances and items not found in Europe. The following devices are available in China, although sometimes rare, and can be constructed by a sufficiently skilled artisan.

### Gunpowder

The Order of Hermes, as the leading body of chemists in Europe, are almost certainly aware of the existence of gunpowder, samples of which reached Europe during the twelfth century. Its formula was slower to arrive, and when it did it was initially all but useless. A key ingredient, a salt originally used in immortality elixirs, is saltpeter, now called potassium nitrate. Although available in China, natural deposits are rare in Europe. Pure sulphur, which together with





charcoal complete the basic formula, is available in China, although, like saltpeter, its export was prohibited, then monopolized by, an early Sung emperor.

Chinese bombs began as fireworks, with weak gunpowder stuffed into bamboo tubes. These high-sulphur bombs were incendiaries, and were flung by siege engine, attached as paper packet arrowheads or thrown by hand. To make them more deadly, arsenic or other poisons were mixed into the gunpowder. Later, as the saltpeter content of gunpowder was improved, true explosives became available and were delivered similarly, although some were constructed in small pots. In 1221, the Chin will record the first use of metal-jacketed bombs, at the siege of Chi'a-chou.

Characters wanting to make gunpowder can do it easily provided they have the correct ingredients. An alchemy roll of 6+ creates an incendiary bomb, three

flares, or a batch of twelve fire arrows. A roll of 9+ creates an explosive bomb, with or without poisonous additives. A roll of 12+ indicates powder strong enough to turn a metal jacket into flying shrapnel. Early gunpowder is quite stable, and is unlikely to explode on a botch.

A roll of 12+ can be used to create a rocket. The process requires a moistened boring tool to be ground through the centre of the charge, so fumbles in this process often have explosive results. Although rockets have yet to reach the height of refinement, lacking stabilizers for decades, the Chinese make up for their lack of accuracy with quantity. Cone-shaped rocket launchers, which fired a single, dispersed volley, were carried by infantrymen and had effective ranges of 170 yards. Larger batteries were carried in wheelbarrows, and fired hundreds of rockets per volley.

## Gunpowder and Combat

### Incendiary Bombs

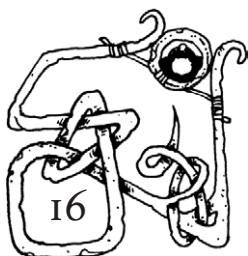
See *Ars Magica* p. 180 for further information on fire and poison damage.

- Paper packets delivered as arrowheads do +5 damage per round, but ignite their targets. If the target is inflammable the goo goes out after d10/2 rounds.
- Rockets are fired in groups which pepper an area, so targeting rolls are needed only in exceptional circumstances. They do +5 damage per round, ignite targets, and burn for d10 rounds if their target is inflammable.
- Early firelances are an incendiary flare mounted on a pole. They do +5 damage per round, and stay alight for five minutes. Some are equipped with multiple barrels, the final fuel of one starting the fuse of its neighbour. They are used as Longshaft Weapons with an effective range of Near. Firelancers are often trained to use their weapon as a quarterstaff in emergencies. These are standard weapons.
- Grenades are thrown, do +10 damage per round, and ignite their targets. They go out after d10 rounds if the target is inflammable.
- Bombs thrown by siege engines can do up to +20 damage per round, and burn for 2d10 rounds.
- Characters can tinker with bombs to lower their damage but extend their burn time.

### Explosives

- Paper packets as arrowheads do +10 damage, -3 per foot from the explosion. They also set ablaze particularly flammable objects.
- Rockets are fired in groups, so that targeting rolls are needed only in exceptional circumstances. They do +10 damage, -1 per foot from the explosion. Since they are fired in clusters, the unfortunate can be harmed by overlapping explosions. They cause particularly flammable objects to catch fire.

- Metal-barrelled firelances can throw shrapnel to middle range or fire pellets to far range, then be used as incendiary flares. Assuming the lance is lit, its statistics are
- Shrapnel / Pellet: Init. +3/+3, Atk +6 / +4, Dmg +5 / +8, Dfn +1 (as spear) or +6 (as quarterstaff). Str 0, Load +1.5, Spc 3, expensive. These attack modifiers include the area-covering effect of shrapnel and multiple pellets. If the firelance shoots individual pellets they are Atk -1. Note that firelances of this type don't need to be straight. Right-angled lances, which allow defenders to fire while remaining behind cover, are common.
- Ceramic-cased grenades are thrown and do +15 damage, -1 per foot from the explosion. These also cause fires, but since most of their damage is due to ceramic shrapnel, it is only in the centre of the blast that fires start. Metal-jacket grenades are not yet in use, but soon will be. They do +20 damage, -1 per foot from the centre of the blast.
- Bombs are usually bamboo-cased and, if of the usual size do +25 damage, -1 per foot from the explosion. Far larger bombs exist, weighing tonnes. Metal-jacketed bombs are slightly anachronistic, but characters staying in China for more than a few years may see or create them. Those of the largest size do +50 damage, -1 per foot from the explosion. These are delivered by trebuchet and can cause fire throughout their blast radius, since their damage is caused by heated shards of metal.
- If a bomb gives off poisonous smoke, the storyguide assigns a strength against which a Stamina roll is made. Many bombs contained several poisons together. One is recorded as containing arsenic, cyanide, ground lacquer (an irritant) and animal dung (to demoralise and encourage infection and plague). Its weight was 1.17 tonnes, and it had a paper jacket.





True guns are yet to develop in China, although firelances are in wide use. A firelance is a long stick, initially bamboo, with an incendiary flare on the end. For the length of its burn it spits out a bright cloud of flame and superheated metal filings. Later designs include metal barrels, multiple barrels which fire simultaneously or in series, poison smoke, shrapnel sprays and ball-shot. The Chinese later develop racks of firelances which are lit with a single fuse. To make an incendiary fire-lance requires a roll of 9+, an explosive 12+. A botched firelance isn't a danger to its maker, only to the soldier holding the stick.

Early alchemical texts record that by mixing saltpetre, sulphur and a bundle of other ingredients, a magician created a purple powder that could turn lead to gold and mercury to silver. Unfortunately, this formula was mistaken, has been lost, is known only to a limited few, or blew all its keepers to pieces.

### Ripe, Grand and Raw Iron

Cast iron won't be widely available in Europe for another 160 years, but has been present in China for about eight centuries. Centuries ago, Chinese alchemists noted that if they kept cast iron molten for a week, when it resolidified it was oddly flexible, a bit like wrought iron, and shattered less readily. This means that when Hermetic wizards arrive in China, they'll see peasants ploughing with — and horses shod with — iron finer than that in their grogs' weapons.

The Chinese believed that cast iron, steel and wrought iron were the same substance, but that the vital juices were bled out of the iron as it descended the hardness scale. They knew that blowing air across molten iron sucked out the "juice". This allowed them to reduce "ripe", or cast, iron and make steel. The Chinese also knew that if they took cast and wrought iron and mixed them, they produced a steel which was strong and flexible. Coupled with their exceptional layer-tempering techniques, the Chinese produce swords that are lighter, stronger, sharper and more flexible than European swords.

The Empire nationalised cast iron making in the first century, so characters probably won't have the equipment to make cast iron. Nonetheless, once they have some, they can decarbonate it into steel with a roll of 9+. Making Chinese swords lies outside the Alchemist's arts, requiring a Chinese-trained master blacksmith.

### Plastic

Lacquer was the first industrial plastic, and is widely used in China during the Sung period. True lacquer is a plant extract, which, once hardened, makes the surface it protects proof against water, acids, alkalis, decay and heat. Lacquered vessels are extremely valuable to the Chinese, both because they are a sign of status, and because they are unaffected by cooking fires. Such objects can confuse Hermetic magi,

since some lacquered objects look as if they have been carved from stone.

It was discovered that lacquer could be prevented from setting through evaporation if crabs were placed in it. Unfortunately, once crabs have been added to lacquer it never hardens. Its 'perpetual liquidity', a form of immortality, made it a substance of intense alchemical interest. Alchemists are aware of the properties of lacquer, but don't need to make rolls to use it. Herbalism is used to harvest lacquer, and skill in painting allows it to be used with economy.

### Magic items

Alchemists are dependant on the magic within objects to enchant items. Although they follow similar rules to Natural Magicians, they are even more dependent on having just the right ingredients in stock to produce the magic item they desire. A Chinese Alchemist's lab total is Intelligence + True Sight + Alchemy + Form and Effect Bonuses + Alchemy bonuses + aura + assistant's intelligence + assistant's Alchemy score if they know this formula. It's a sign of unusual trust to demonstrate the making of magic items to apprentices.







# Mythic Cathay: Buddhism

by Timothy Ferguson

The third great religious tradition of China, Buddhism, was brought from the West by Indian missionaries. Readers familiar with Buddhism from South East Asian or modern Western sources may find this description differs markedly from that which is familiar. In the modern West the Hinayana school of Buddhism, with its focus on the individual and its disinterest in divinities, is popular. Although Hinayana Buddhists can be found in Mythic China, they are a tiny minority when compared to the Mahayanans, the Buddhists who worship a vast pantheon of divinities.

## The Buddha's last life

The founder of Buddhism, Shih-chia-mu-ni, was an Indian prince who lived so sheltered a life he was unaware that outside the walls of his palace, death and suffering existed. Once he discovered these things, he became determined to find a way to avoid suffering. First he threw himself into a round of lubricious licentiousness, but he grew jaded. Then he lived as an ascetic, but found suffering there also. In the simplest sense, he determined that the suffering was inevitable, like the pain of being born, or arose from striving, since wanting things makes disappointment possible.

The nature of the Buddha is one of the key differences in the beliefs of the two branches of this faith. The Theravadan Buddhists believe that the

founder was a man of great wisdom with a gift for teaching. Further, they believe that even if gods exist, they too are trapped in the Wheel of Karma, so praying to them is futile. Theravadan Buddhists believe each person must save themselves.

The Mahayan Buddhist believe that there have been more Buddhas than there are grains of sand on the bank of a river, and that Sakyamuni was the latest incarnation of one of these. Further, they believe that certain enlightened beings, the bodhisattvas, have chosen to delay their entry into buddhahood until everyone else is saved. Mahayan Buddhist believe that spiritual forces assist salvation, and that people should help each other along the path, following the example of the bodhisattvas.

## The Golden Mean and the Eightfold Path

Shih-chia-mu-ni determined that the way to avoid suffering was to follow the narrow path between extremes, so as to avoid striving. The way, another meaning for the word Tao, is made up of eight steps. The Eightfold Path is not the only way to Enlightenment, but it is the one usually expressed in Buddhist teaching. This is because although there are as many methods for teaching as there are students, this one is useful in many places and times. The following is a shallow simplification of the Eightfold Path, suitable for roleplaying purposes.

- **Right understanding:** The understanding, on the highest level, of the Four Noble Truths. Simplified these are: that sorrow is omnipresent in life, that we add extra sorrow by desiring things, that to cease striving stops additional sorrow accumulating and that the Eightfold Path leads away from suffering.
- **Right thought:** Having thoughts which are not muddled by worldly illusions and an awareness that memories are deceptive.
- **Right speech:** Honest speech, that does not harm others, or self-delude.
- **Right action:** Reacting to the world in a way which is guided by Buddha wisdom. Right action includes an awareness that the believer is not omniscient, so, for example, setting the goal of fighting evil is doomed to failure, because it is striving. It is similar to the Taoist ideal of reaction guided by the underlying forces, rather than out of personal volition.
- **Right livelihood:** Leaving behind those social expectations and filial ties which draw one away from the path. Although it is possible to live rightly within society, it is perhaps easier as part of the sangha, the body of Buddhist monastic devotees.
- **Right effort:** To love all things boundlessly. Bodhisattvas demonstrate this virtue in their vow to delay Buddhahood until all others are saved.
- **Right mindfulness:** Avoiding hollow actions performed by rote. Being aware of all that one does as one does it, while also being aware that



one is following the Path. Cultivating a simple view of things.

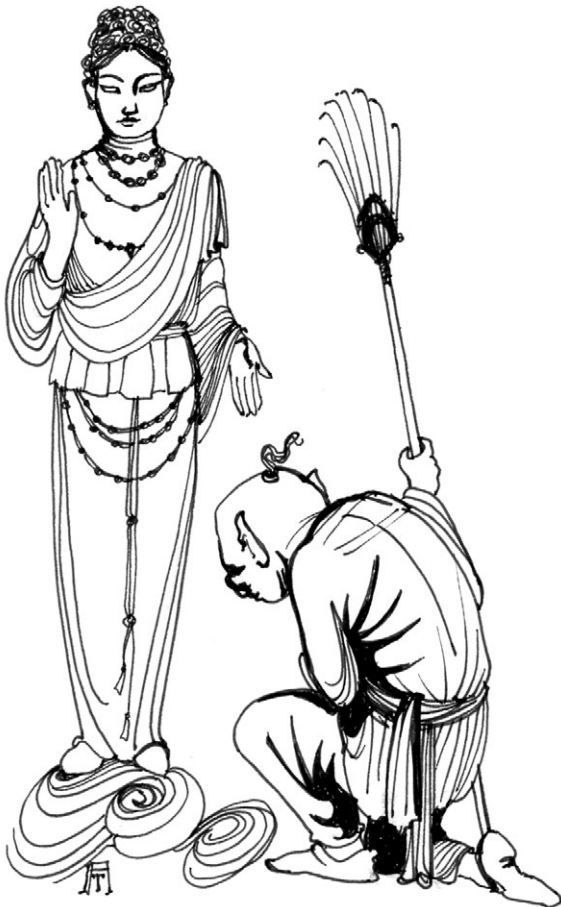
- **Right concentration:** Disciplining the mind through one of the many styles of meditation to be focused in such a way that it is in absolute accord with the Eightfold Path.

### Nirvana and Bodhi

Nirvana is the state of bliss sought by Theravadan Buddhists. When it is reached the illusions of the world, the samsara, are destroyed and the ego is literally “blown out”, like the flame of a lamp. Although this term is sometimes used for the ultimate states of other Buddhists, the Sanskrit term bodhi, which means “awakened”, describes them better. It is usually translated into English as “enlightenment”.

For the Mahayanans, enlightenment occurs when integration within the samsara is possible. This is their definition of Buddhahood. For Buddhists of the enormously-popular Pure Land Sect, enlightenment is the state which allows rebirth in a paradise to the far west. In either case, this is the point at which one may become a bodhisattva.

The Pure Land is billions of worlds away from this one, and Buddhas inhabit all of those worlds. To be reborn there, some Chinese believe, you need only say a certain mantra, with utter conviction, once in your life. Others suggest that saying the mantra ten times with your ten last breaths is required. The sutra on which this sect is based suggests that this is made easy if one holds the appropriate Buddha in one's mind for a week at some stage of one's life. This



allows him to appear to the dying, which allows them to concentrate on the mantra.

### The Five Precepts

For those Buddhists unwilling to follow the Path, five basic rules have been set down to prevent them inflicting on themselves the worst karmic damage. These precepts are:

- Do not kill.
- Do not lie
- Do not steal
- Do not be unchaste
- Do not take intoxicants

### The Journey to the West

In Chinese myth, the Mahayanan Buddhist scriptures were bought to China by a monk who crossed the deserts and mountains to India, then returned, presenting these new works to the Emperor. Although this journey did take place, it was only one of many pilgrimages and proselytisation tours from each direction.

In Mythic China, this monk's journey is accurately described in a work called Hsi-yu Chi, the Record of the Journey to the West. In English this work is often named Monkey after its main character, a powerful animal spirit who aids the monk on his journey. It's highly recommended as a reference and source of adventure ideas.

This work records key Mahayana beliefs about the other belief systems of China. It implies that the Hinyanan scriptures are not wrong, but were given by the Gutama Buddha as a preparatory teaching, superseded by the Mahayanan texts. It also states that the Three Faiths are One, since Buddhism does not reject that which complements its message.

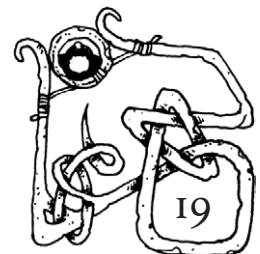
### Reincarnation and forgetting

The reincarnated have forgotten their previous lives and cannot remember them by any method. Even Earthly Buddhas don't know what they did in their past lives. A character who dies is therefore unrecoverable.

Tempting as it is to allow players to follow the progress of a single soul through its many lives, usually this is unrealistic. The dead are reborn into better or worse stations according to their karmic balance at the end of each life. Many Hermetic magi, especially of the violent and adventurous type, will deserve to be reborn as animals. If the focus of the campaign is a group of pious Theravada Buddhists, then successive monks, each containing the same amnesiac soul, are a possibility.

### Reincarnative destiny

In the folk blend of Mahayanan Buddhism and heterodox Taoism, great spirits who transgress sometimes return to Earth to expiate that error as special mortals. Although initially unaware of their faults, eventually Kwan Yin or a friend from their previous life explains the nature of their crime. This allows them to expiate their errors and re-enter







Heaven, in Taoist stories, or become enlightened, in Buddhist stories.

An example is the pig spirit in “Journey to the West”. He was a Heavenly General who became drunk and became amorous with the Moon Goddess, so he was cast to Earth. He retains his fighting skills, and a magical muck-rake presented to him by the Jade Emperor, and after his redemptive quest rises to the position of Collector of Sacrifices in the Buddhist pantheon.

Storyguides may wish to allow these special mortals as player characters. They are designed like other Mystic Companions. Players of reincarnated transgressives lose their magus slot, but play companions with 10 free points of Virtues, as well as the ten points of Virtues they must counterbalance with Flaws. Many of these characters are exceptionally skilled with weapons.

Chinese myth also includes sorcerers who are reincarnate shen. These are not permitted as player characters, but are available as NPCs. Such exceptional magicians often serve as the patriarchs of Taoist schools and Buddhist monasteries.

## Monastic Life

It is desirable, in Buddhist populations, for most young men to spend some time in monastic communities. For game purposes, a year is the usual, although historically the term varied. During this period most young men learn the fundamentals of Buddhist theology, along with other appropriate skills. At times Buddhism is out of favour with the secular authorities, and then young men from families of rank avoid monastic service. “Those who have left behind the household” serve most of the functions of monks, but are kept from possible temptation more carefully.

Many of the beliefs outlined here are responses to Dharma, the laws of the Universe. The Dharma is unalterable, so the correct human response to it doesn’t change. The following traditions arise when the Dharma is interpreted to answer daily questions.

Monks dress in robes, which are usually yellow, although their style varies with tradition and climatic conditions. Each monk is equipped with a bowl and water filter, as well as other minor articles of clothing. The function of each of these objects is explained during their ordination ceremony.

Monks are expected to be decorous. They express the balance within their lives with precise body language and mild speech. They avoid frivolous conversation, focusing on interpretations of the Dharma. They eat little, and take whatever is served in a monastery, or is offered as alms, provided it meets their dietary requirements.

Monks prefer to travel in groups, and unaccompanied travel with a woman is forbidden. If a long journey forces them to be away from their monastery at night, they try to stay at other religious establishments. In part this is because they are forbidden to sleep in the same room as a woman. Physical contact

with the opposite gender, even blood relatives, is also taboo.

## Rabjung, leaving behind the household

This ceremony serves as a prerequisite for ordination as a novice, and allows outsiders to join sanga communities temporarily. The structure of the ceremony is simple, but its stages are complicated and few troupes will play them. To begin, the petitioner is asked a series of questions to determine if he is a suitable candidate. He is then presented for a brief ceremony in which he prostrates himself and requests admission. If accepted his white, lay clothes are exchanged for a robe and then his head, or a remaining topknot of hair, are shaved. The functions of his monastic gear are explained to him, and then he swears to keep the precepts described below. Rice and flowers are thrown in celebration of his leaving behind the householder’s life.

In the Tibetan tradition, there are over 40 questions, which check if a candidate is barred from ordination. These range from the practical “Do you have the permission of the king to be ordained?”, “Are you older than seven?”, “Have you all of your limbs?”, through the religious “Are you a heretic or schismatic?”, “Do you not accept the Doctrine of Cause and Effect?”, “Are you of differing views (about the Dharma)?” to the unusual: “Are you an animal?”, “Are you a spirit?”, “Are you masquerading as a person from another country or world?”.

Monastic novices are required to keep 10 precepts, which are often extrapolated into 36. These are to not

kill (this includes thoughtlessly killing insects, hence the water strainer required for all monks.)

steal

have sexual intercourse

lie (especially about spiritual matters)

take intoxicants

sing, dance or play music (for self-indulgent reasons)

wear perfumes, ornaments or cosmetics (which includes non-monastic clothing or long hair)

sit on a high or expensive bed or throne

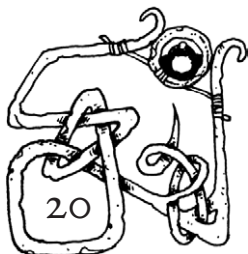
eat after noon (unless ill, travelling or unable to meditate through lack of food.)

touch precious objects (including money)

## Buddhist characters

Buddhist player characters are designed as Western ascetics, who avoid extremes and worldly pollutants. Their impure acts are as outlined above. Unlike Internal Alchemists, described in a previous article, Buddhists

- Use the free Virtue package Purity +5, Mystic Understanding +4 and Wise one +1. Characters who have spent time as monks, but have since returned to the secular world, choose another Social Class Virtue or Flaw instead, if they’ve continued to practice Buddhist purity.



- Are not limited by the teachings of their masters, and begin able to produce any effect on the Transcendence Table for which their scores are sufficient.
- Only double their Purity score before subtracting it from their Ageing rolls.
- Roll Stress + Purity to use Mystic Understanding. If successful, they ask the storyguide a question and are given an accurate, if somewhat vague, answer. Those playing Ch'an Buddhists should expect confusing aphorisms. Players may only ask one question about a given subject.
- Subtract their Purity score from all ability checks of Guile, Charm, Folk ken, and all social skills save Leadership.
- Add their Purity score to checks of Alertness, Concentration, Disputation, Leadership, Survival, Dowsing, True Sight
- Have the beginning skills:
  - True Sight 3
  - Charm 2
  - Concentration 4
  - Buddhist Theology 3
  - Scribe Chinese 4
  - Speak Chinese 5
  - Leadership 2
  - Awareness 3
- + (10 + age) experience spent at the player's discretion
- A character who does not devote his life to the sangha, but instead spends only a year in retreat from his usual life, gains no particular Virtues but may select skills that reflect a year of study in a monastery. This does not cost any Virtue points: it is a 0 point background Virtue.

## Other Buddhist Schools

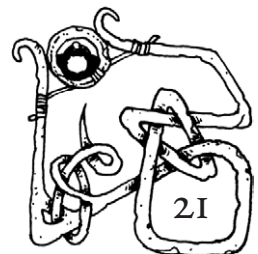
Two other types of Buddhist need to be dealt with briefly, since players may request them. Players wishing to design characters from the Vajrayana (Tantric) branch or Ch'an (Chinese Zen) school should use the descriptions for other Buddhists, but modify their roleplaying slightly.

Tantric Buddhists use written texts, symbolic visualisation and mantras in their religious practice. Although Tantric magic has a rich history and would reward player research, it is a minority religion in China and can't be dealt with in detail in an article of this length. Their philosophy is that energy should never be suppressed, only transformed, which makes them more active than other monastic orders.

Tantric magicians lack an external, moral reference for their practices. Those who lack the wisdom developed through meditation or a desire to help others can cause great harm to themselves and those around them. To prevent this, all Tantric monks are trained to be utterly dedicated to a wise teacher, who gradually passes on mystical knowledge as their student attains the wisdom to use it correctly.

Tantric magicians are Ascetics, but gain the ability to perform each type of miraculous act only when their master, as played by the storyguide, demonstrates a safe method to them. Wicked Tantric monks can ignore this prohibition, at great personal and societal cost. The Purity score of wicked monks doesn't effectively fall, so their evil is not limited by a loss of power.

Ch'an Buddhists use riddles and paradoxical statements to illuminate ideas. Central to their practice is zazen, emptying the mind of all thought. Their practice of living in the moment and performing each action perfectly is particularly apparent to outsiders, and can be represented with Virtues. These minor differences aside, they can be designed using the rules above.







# Mythic Cathay: The Meta-Bestiary

by Timothy Ferguson

This metabestiary emerged from the attempt to write Mythic Cathay, a Chinese sourcebook for *Ars Magica*. Many of the other regional sourcebooks for *Ars Magica* contain a bestiary, which usually includes fairies, monsters and local divinities. China is so vast that, using the criteria for previous books, about 400 gods rate a paragraph. A far larger number of spirits and demons demand inclusion.

Instead, this article includes descriptions of those classes of creature that appear most often in Chinese stories. An insert at the end of the article includes guidelines for designing new gods, demons, animal spirits and animate idols. Examples of Chinese undead have been given, but no guidelines have been provided because they are so simple to design. A comprehensive Chinese bestiary is impossible, so this article provides you with the tools to design your own spirits.

## Shen (Gods)

The shen, gods, representing the three major Chinese philosophies are entwined in Chinese popular belief. It's common to find statutes of "Buddhist", "Taoist" and local deities all jumbled together in shrines. The gods have roles that mirror earthly civilisation, so there is an Emperor of the Gods, each city has a mandarin called the City God and a local, influential gentleman, the Earth God. The Celestial Bureaucracy has Departments that are staffed by gods for every function of human life. Popular departments include Health and Examinations.

Outside the Bureaucracy of Heaven are the gods at the fringes of the Empire, who control little territories near where they dwell. As the Bureaucracy expands these gods are often offered minor roles, for example as Landlord Gods, which parallel local governors. When this occurs humans, such as the Emperor, are sent dreams telling them to proclaim the foreign god's inclusion into the Bureaucracy. Within the Empire there are shen who are yet to be recruited to the Celestial Bureaucracy. These gods have followers whose local cults swell until the Jade Emperor finds their god a job, and the mundane Emperor recognises their existence. Many of these new, indigenous gods were once humans.

## Annoying the Divinities

Although the Chinese gods are powerful, the minor ones can be confronted and dismissed by powerful magicians. The difficulty is knowing, in advance, whether the shen you are annoying is of minor power or is simply too lazy to cultivate a following. Such antagonised shen can grant magical knowledge, treasure or mundane information in exchange for being left alone, but they have long

memories and sometimes gain additional power if their divine rank is increased. Shen within the Celestial Bureaucracy can often request the assistance of their superiors, to deal with mortals who trouble them, so those annoying gods for profit should target foreign gods.

## The Dead

### Gods and Corpses

Strictly speaking, to a Taoist, gods you pray to are a type of ghost. They believe that if gods do their jobs well enough, they eventually transcend and become stellar beings, so abstract as to be uncontactable by humans. Taoists recognise the following classes of spirit.

**Kui-shen:** Restless dead

**Jen-shen:** Humans free of the weaknesses of embodiment

**Ti-shen:** Humans who have gained Earthly immortality.

**Shen-hsien:** Humans who now dwell in the Land of the Blessed.

**T'ien-hsien:** Those who have transcended and live forever in Heaven.

Chinese ghosts come in many types, and some of these are dangerous. The most common are the orphaned dead, who are made resentful by the poverty they endure as they await release into spirithood.

### Kuei or Tsu-shih

The kuei are ghosts not in the Underworld. They are either unable to enter, or have leave to visit the world of mortals. They are most frequently present during the month of Hungry Ghosts, when the gates of the Underworld open and allow the inhabitants to visit their descendants. One's own "ancestors" are called tsu-shih, because to call them kuei or shen might annoy and bring bad luck. Ghosts are propitiated with burnt offerings, usually special money and paper representations of clothes. Other items are possible, and are similarly incinerated. Sacrifices to the kuei are always performed outdoors.

The ghosts who are unable to enter the Underworld are usually those who have died before the time appointed for them in the Great Book of Life and Death. In Taiwan, ghosts who have yet to become shen are propitiated as Ta Cheung-yeh, the Great Multitude of Honoured Ones, and are sometimes represented as a single figure. These ghosts are said to be those who have died due to fire, water, battle or thieves.

### Ku-hun and Yu-ying Kung

Little shrines, popular in certain parts of China, contain tablets to Ku hun, "orphan ghosts". These appease ghosts who have no family to provide for them. Such shrines are often erected where many orphan ghosts are expected to dwell, for example on battlefields or seashores where wrecks are common. In these cases it is the lack of effective filial burial, which orphans the ghost. There are many subdivisions of orphaned ghost.



The Yu-ying Kung, the “Ones Who Answer Petitions” (or “Responsive Lords”) are the ghosts of unidentified people whose bones have been discovered. They are thought to be able to change the luck of gamblers. Another Taiwanese cult, that of the I-min Kung (“Righteous Lords”) venerates the first mainland settlers of Taiwan, who died on the frontier, unremembered and without family to bury them, as well as those who died for some noble cause. Precisely who the Righteous Lords were in life varies by locale, as those who died in inter-ethnic battle are venerated, each by their own side.

### Yin Shen

The term yin shen, “dark spirit”, has as many interpretations as “shen”, but in some areas it is used for ancient spirits who, because of their violent deaths, cannot ever enter the Underworld. Their bitter resentment of the living makes them exceptionally dangerous and difficult to appease. They are particularly effective villains for stories.

Statues of the Quilt, or the Four Diamond Kings, guard a grave so that the spirit inside cannot leave. Usually this is a temporary measure, used, for example, in the case of a suicide, to bottle up their ghost until the correct time comes for them to enter the underworld. It is also effective in circumstances of vampirism, however, so removing these statues from graves is a foolish practice.

### Vampires

The number of vampires described in Chinese folklore is tremendously large. The following are some of the key types, but you are encouraged to develop others.

#### The Sexy Dead

In the genre conventions for Chinese stories, beautiful ghosts sometimes tempt heroes. In a sense many of these spirits are vampires, since they drain either the blood or the vitality of the men they love. It's not unusual for these delightful spirits to be enslaved by whomever has their funeral urn, forced to prostitute themselves by threats, one of which is to leave their urns in sunlight, which sometimes prevents the ghost ever being reincarnated. The hero is often given the heartbreaking duty of returning his beloved's ashes to her family, so that she can progress to the next life.

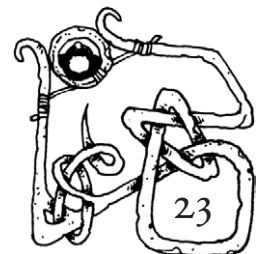
Sometimes, however, there is a happy ending. The story that was the inspiration for many others of this type is *Nie Xiaoqin*. In it, a merchant is travelling through the country when his daughter dies and is buried by a small deserted shrine. A demonic tree called Granny rules the local ghosts. It forces Xiaoqin to appear each night in the shrine and have sex with travellers. This renders them unconscious, which allows Granny to suck their blood. When Xiaoqin fails to seduce an incorruptible scholar, she loses her heart to him and begs him to free her. Gaining the aid of a Taoist swordsman, who needs to collect 100 ghosts to become immortal, the scholar destroys Granny and transplants Xiaoqin's urn to his

home. They marry and have two children, while the Taoist friar becomes Immortal. This story was filmed as *Chinese Ghost Story*, although the ending has been changed.

A character with a happy spectral romance has a more powerful version of the Ghostly Warder virtue and probably True Love as well. Ghosts have limited potential as Mystical Companions, because they have to avoid sunlight and tend to be monomaniacs. That being said, Xiaoquin's children may have been half-ghosts. Similar creatures might be designed, through negotiation with the storyguide, as Mystical Companions. They could also make dangerous adversaries, since they might ignore the Aegis of the Hearth, being souled, and might be able to walk through walls.

### Hopping vampires

Chinese myths and films (for example *Mister Vampire*) sometimes contain hopping vampires. These are corpses dressed in full funeral regalia that have been animated by a mortician and are forced to obey his will by a magic figure drawn on paper then stuck on their forehead. Magi travelling in China might see a procession of these creatures, bouncing stiffly behind their master, along an Imperial highway. Disturbing as these vampires are, provided the fu remain affixed to their foreheads, they are entirely







biddable and perfectly safe. They are created for the convenient transport of corpses back to the provinces in which their families reside. Since the procedure is expensive, the vampires are usually from the wealthiest classes.

Hopping vampires are created naturally when a person fails to exhale their final breath. This lodges in the throat and provides enough vital force for the corpse to move. Such monsters are created artificially with a bamboo tube shoved into the corpse's mouth and a quick puff of air from the mortician. They can be destroyed by dismemberment or flame, but another method is to remove the final breath from the creature's throat. This is why a swift jab to the solar plexus deaminates them so efficiently.

### Common vampires

Some Chinese believed the soul, at death, divides into three parts. The first, usually "good" part, goes to the afterlife, the second, usually bad, sometimes resides in the body and the third, which is what makes children look like their parents, goes to dwell in the ancestral tablet. Vampires are created when the lesser soul takes possession of the body and attempts to feed on blood and flesh. These are much like European vampires, although some have sharp fingernails instead of fangs or glossi.

### Romantic Ghost

Ghosts in *Ars Magica* spend permanent Might to affect the world about them. Unlike the ghosts described in other supplements, this sort of spirit has the ability to regain permanent Might by draining blood. This makes them similar to certain dark fairies in the West.

Characteristics: Vary within human range, but all appear extremely comely, except to those with Second Sight. Ghosts' reflections often appear to be decaying.

Wild (Faerie or Magical) Might 5 or more

Size -1

Personality Traits: Vary

Weapon/Attack: Fingernails, teeth, hairpins, scarves

Soak: 1

Body Levels: 0/-1/-3/-5, Incapacitated

Abilities: as in life.

Equipment: Urn. The holder of a ghost's urn can force it into service.

Vis: 1 Imaginem or other per 5 Might.

Powers

- *Discorporate* [MuVi(Co) 45] Ghosts can become insubstantial or embodied as they wish. Some of the weaker ones must concentrate to change, which prevents them using this ability in combat.

- *Exhaust* [PeCo10] After vigorous intercourse, the victim (having already expended a fatigue level) must make a Fatigue roll of 9+ or lose another. Many ghosts have far more dangerous versions of this power.



The statistics of common and hopping vampires are identical, since they are the domesticated and untamed versions of the same creature, but the longer the common vampire lives, the more idiosyncratic its lifestyle and equipment become.

### Will-o-the-wisps

Where corpses and coffins decay the negative energy released forms will-o-the-wisps that are vampiric. Fortunately these creatures lack intelligence, relying on predatory instinct to guide their hunts.

### Tuzoigui

These creatures are the ghosts of women who died childless or in childbirth. They suck the breath of infants, causing cot death. Talismans placed over their cribs can protect children. A common one in wealthy families is a sword made of bound-together coins. Tuzoigui are incorporeal but have small Might scores, usually overcome by folk charms.

## Guei (Demons) and Yen Ch'a (Yakashas)

Long ago a war between Heaven and a powerful celestial spirit smashed a hole in the Heavens to the far west. This is why the stationary star no longer lies above the centre of China. Through this hole, to which the Great Tree grows, demons enter the world. Although those now in the world are relatively few, many still rise up from the underworld, counterbalancing the Celestial court.

In ancient times the demons were more numerous and had many skirmishes with human heroes and the forces of Heaven. Those demons that survived either hid in the underworld or have been tamed and now serve the Celestial Bureaucracy. The Lord of the Underworld employs many of them, but the Thirty-Six Generals have armies of trained

### Hopping Vampires

Characteristics: Vary within human range, save that they are tireless and have enhanced Strength Might 5

Size 0

Personality Traits: Predatory +5

Weapon/Attack: Init Atk Dfn Dmg

Bite: -3 0 0 +3

Brawl\* -2 0 0 +5

\*Hopping vampires are slow and predictable in their movements. They prefer to strangle or pin then bite.

Soak: +10

Body Levels: 0/0/-1/-1/-3/Destroyed\*

Vampires are not incapacitated by injury in the same way the living are.

Tireless: 0 points

Equipment: Funeral garb

Powers

*Create Vampire* Pe(Mu)Co 25: The bite of a vampire curses the victim, so that their blood slows and they die, becoming a vampire themselves. There are several magical remedies for this poison.

demons under their command, and many other gods have one or two who serve as heavies and oddjobs-men. Some few have become gods themselves, to whom people turn when other demons are causing trouble, especially through spreading plague.

The Yen Ch'a are one of the classes of Buddhist supernatural beings, originally of Hindu derivation. They invisibly scour the earth and lower heaven, either causing trouble or, if friendly, providing reports to the gods and minor services for people. They are never venerated as individuals, and are conceptually similar enough to Guei that in Mythic Cathay, the two terms denote court of alignment.

## Animal spirits

Animal spirits are either natural, like the faeries of the West, or a form of demotion for transgressive shen. Reborn in animal form, they work through their spiritual flaws and reascend into Heaven. Its unusual for these creatures to have any direct memory of their previous life, but the Goddess of Mercy has a habit of explaining the creature's circumstances and offering a difficult penance. Very occasionally an animal will demonstrate such virtue that it will be reincarnated as one of these spirits, which allows it to then attempt evolution into human form. Animal spirits can be played either as Mystical or Faerie Companions.

## Spirits of inanimate objects

Chinese popular religion arose from animism, the belief that all things have spirits, which can be worshipped, coerced and communicated with. Many Hermetic magi recognise the animist premise because several Hermetic spells, e.g. "Voice of the Lake", "Stone Tell of the Mind that Sits", and "Voice of the Flames", indicate that inanimate things are self-aware and have memories. Western magi don't often see the point of worshipping lakes and boulders, so they remain insignificant.

The Chinese, however, are dimly aware that worshipping objects makes them more inclined to assist humans. Although no Hermetic magi have ever studied this process, a Merinita magus might describe it thus: worship is an act of Free Expression which, over time, lays new correspondences on the spirits found in natural objects. The key change is that the creature is considered able to bring good fortune in a single, restricted sphere, such as luck while traveling one stretch of road, or aid in not catching a certain illness for a limited time. The barely-extant elemental is altered into a tiny spirit with extremely modest, but nonetheless useful, powers.

After many years of diligent labour, this little spirit can, rarely, be recognised by the Celestial Bureaucracy as a Landlord God, Earth God or courtier to one of these. This then transforms the brownie-level of creature into something akin in power to the western trooping faerie. Note that humans can't force this change: it comes from Above. Others claim that the stones are the homes of

minor spirits all along, but that these spirits are different from the underlying spirits of the rocks and streams. Their view is probably closer to the Hermetic theory of elementals.

## Ill-luck spirits

Concern with object spirits often focuses on avoiding the poor luck they can cause. Just as dead humans have ghosts, some destroyed objects, like trees or rocks, can leave malevolent beings behind. Some large stones harbour spirits who require propitiation. Statues and steles often contain spirits of artifice who resent humans. Minor offerings and charms often provide sufficient protection from these obstacles.

## Spirits of artifice

Spirits of artifice, described in Hedge Magic, animate objects of human construction. In the animist view, the process of crafting an object alters the spirit within the raw material. Other objects are given power through rituals which draw powerful spirits into them.

## Idols

The most powerful spirits of artifice in China are the shen themselves, drawn into bodies provided by god-carvers. Such statutes provide useful adversaries in sagas, because most divinities only channel a portion of their power through idols, and most lack the ability to make these wooden statues more difficult to destroy. The rituals of idol preparation are lengthy and complex, but defacing an idol, so that the divine can no longer reside within it, is simple.

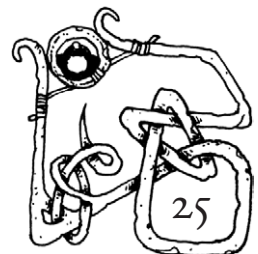
Aside from burning and dismemberment, some idols have an added weakness. Most are dedicated with a sacrifice that gives a spark of life to the wood. This can include an insect stoppered inside the image, or the dotting of the statue's eyes with cockerel's blood. Removing this "spark" may de-animate an idol.

## Animals of Virtue

*Hedge Magic* introduced the idea of Virtuous Animals, a source of vis and familiars for Hermetic magi. In China these creatures have an important politico-religious role.

To the Han, and those following, the arrival of odd animals - lions, giraffes, zebras, and such - at the court, was seen as proof of the virtue of the prince. Killing one is sacrilege and deprives the emperor of proof of the support of the gods. Sensible characters discovering Virtuous animals should capture them and take them to the Forbidden City, to be rewarded by the court. To do otherwise invites the wrath of Heaven, and the displeasure of the Son of Heaven.

Which animals the Chinese consider to be symbols of Heavenly support may confuse Hermetic magi. A perfectly normal giraffe may keep the company of a qilin and a Virtuous lion in the royal menagerie, while a delegation with a Kazam Serpent might be turned away. The Might of the creature is







## Terminology

Many Virtuous animals represented in Chinese art and myths have identical powers, but look a little different from Western representatives of their species. Each storyguide should decide if these are separate species, or if this difference is simply one of representation by human artists. Certain animals are given the same names in English, but are clearly different, like the two types of phoenix or unicorn. In Chinese sagas it is better to use Chinese terms for Chinese animals. This helps the players to leave their preconceptions behind. When playing Westerners in China, a confusion of terms may be beneficial.

less important than its regality, rarity and air of otherworldliness.

## The Qilin

The ultimate symbol of Divine favour is the qilin, which is usually translated as “unicorn”. These creatures have bodies like deer, with a single, straight horn protruding from their foreheads. Only one is

seen at a time, since no emperor has ever been so blessed as to deserve the presence of a plurality. Attacking a qilin makes as much sense as attacking a Western angel, so no combat statistics are included here.

## Lung (Dragons)

The dragons of China are water and weather spirits. Their size and seniority ascend with the magnitude of their fluid realms, so well-dragons are smaller than stream dragons, which are, in turn, smaller than river dragons. Superior to these are the Four Dragon Kings of the Oceans, the most important of whom, to the Chinese, is the Dragon King of the Eastern Sea. Some wells and streams have portals to his palace on their beds. As a separate, or possibly superior hierarchy, the Junior and Senior Heavenly Dragons control where rain falls, and are therefore of ultimate importance in agrarian communities. The largest dragons may be the Green (or Azure) Dragon of the East, one of the four elemental demons who helped craft the world.

## Well Dragon

This is a well dragon of the largest size. Far smaller dragons exist. One of the spirits Monkey fights on his way to India has a tiny, chilly dragon as his familiar, which he hides about his person.

Characteristics Int 2, Per 3, Pre 3, Com 1, Str 7, Sta 8, Dex 0, Qik 0

Civilised (Faerie) Might: 40

Size: 5

Personality Traits: Cunning +3, Polite +2

| Weapon/Attack | Init. | Atk | Dfn | Dam |
|---------------|-------|-----|-----|-----|
|---------------|-------|-----|-----|-----|

|      |    |      |    |     |
|------|----|------|----|-----|
| Bite | +8 | +12* | +4 | +25 |
|------|----|------|----|-----|

|      |    |     |    |     |
|------|----|-----|----|-----|
| Claw | +8 | +12 | +4 | +30 |
|------|----|-----|----|-----|

\*Engulfs: anyone taking a body level or more of damage must roll a simple die + Size of 6+ or be swallowed. Characters can cut their way out from the throat (Soak 12) or the stomach (Soak 15). Those entering the stomach must soak 20 points of damage per round from stomach acid.

Soak: +20

Fatigue: +10

Fatigue Levels: OK/OK/, 0/0, -1/-1, -3/-3, -5/-5, Unconscious

Body Levels: OK/OK/, 0/0, -1/-1, -3/-3, -5/-5, Incapacitated

Equipment: Many dragon-grottoes have portals to the palace of the Dragon of the Eastern Ocean.

Vis: 15 Aquam, 10 Auram, 10 Vim, 5 Rego

Powers:

*Faerie Powers\**: Communicate with plants/animals/people (especially in or around water) 21, Control Element: Auram and Aquam 5.

\* Dragons often use fish or other subaquatic creatures as spies and messengers, but can probably send dreams like other gods. Their elemental control powers affect the weather, give them the ability to fly and make them fearsome opponents in their liquid domains.

## Senior Heavenly Dragon

Although characters are unlikely to combat Senior Heavenly Dragons, they might, in high fantasy sagas, interact with them. The other ranks of dragon form a continuum between these two sets of statistics, with one exception. The Green Dragon of the East is physically similar, although often represented anthropomorphically. It is closely tied to the Agent of Wood and lacks weather control powers.

Characteristics Int 6, Per 3, Pre 6, Com 1, Str 9, Sta 10, Dex -2, Qik -2

Civilised (Magic) Might: 60

Size: 8

Personality Traits: Wise +3

| Weapon/Attack | Init. | Atk | Dfn | Dam |
|---------------|-------|-----|-----|-----|
|---------------|-------|-----|-----|-----|

|      |    |      |    |     |
|------|----|------|----|-----|
| Bite | +6 | +16* | +8 | +30 |
|------|----|------|----|-----|

|      |    |     |    |     |
|------|----|-----|----|-----|
| Claw | +6 | +16 | +8 | +35 |
|------|----|-----|----|-----|

\*Engulfs: anyone taking a body level or more of damage must roll a simple die + Size of 9+ or be swallowed. Characters can cut their way out from the throat (Soak 18) or the stomach (Soak 21). Those entering the stomach must soak 35 points of damage per round from stomach acid.

Soak: +25

Fatigue: +15

Body Levels: OK/OK/, 0/0/0, -1/-1/-1, -3/-3, -5/-5, Unconscious

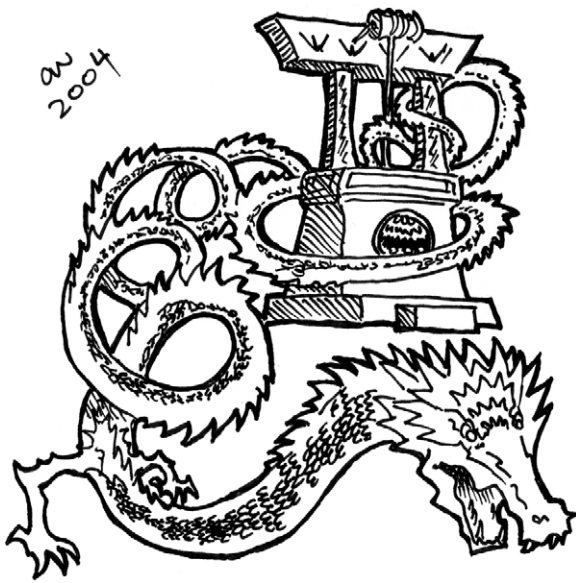
Vis: 15 Auram, 10 Aquam, 10 Rego, 10 Vim

Powers

*Faerie Powers\**: Communicate with plants/animals/people 21, Control Element: Auram and Aquam 15

\* Dragons use lesser gods and magical birds as messengers, but can probably send dreams much like other immortals. Their elemental control powers affect the weather, give them the ability to fly and, by creating thunder, restore fatigue.





Dragon powers, listed below, are drawn from the Faeries supplement. This doesn't mean all dragons are faeries, simply that their abilities are well modelled by that system, so, to save space, it's been used.

In the Dragon and the Bear Mongol spirit dragons are given the powers of glamour and fear. Chinese dragons don't use either power, because they are 'naturally' terrifying and, if their grottoes are glamorous, they never forget them long enough for anyone to notice. Mongol spirit dragons represent the threat of the rampaging Mongol horde to the spirituality of the Slavs. True Chinese dragons are mightier, but are less fixated on destruction.

Many regions tell of a spinster befriended, or a virgin raped, by a river dragon. Children from these unions became heroes or servants of their father, and this provides a background for Mystical Companions. Often the raped girl would commit suicide by drowning herself in the river, which was taken as a sign that she had become the dragon's bride, and could be prayed to for rain. Such cults tend to quickly fade away.

One Cantonese cult, Mother of the Dragon, tells of a virgin who raised a snake that lived with her for the rest of her life, ascending to Heaven in a thunderstorm that followed her death. It is believed she can intercede with her stepson, to arrange good weather. Spinsters with pet dragons make interesting non-player characters, and can be generated as player characters using a variant of the Faerie Friend virtue.

## Creating your own spirits, demons and divinities

### Checklist

#### Sphere

What function do you want the creature to have? Don't worry if another spirit is listed as having the same role — China's religions have coalesced from a number of centres, so some overlap occurs. Determine the area in which your spirit will be active and

the flavour of powers they use. This helps determine what their personality traits will be.

If your character is a shen, were they ever alive? What sort of life did it lead? This probably links, in some way, to the shen's function and powers after death.

### Tame or wild?

Determine if your spirit is Civilised or Wild. If your creature is Civilised, whom does it serve? This determines its Realm and places an upper limit on its Might, at 5 less than its master. Generally, Taoist and popular religion deities are Magical, and Buddhist magnates are Faeries, but this isn't exclusively the case. This affiliation determines from whom it can request aid. If this spirit rules over or kills other spirits of similar type, add at least 5 to the figure given later in the Might table.

### Appearance

Animal spirits look human, but have minor features that suggest their type. Since virtually all of them are Wild, they tend to dress and act vibrantly, perhaps discordantly.

Demons are usually bestial anthropomorphs. Odd coloured skin and ear tufts, protuberances that can be mistaken for horns, are common.

Civilised gods are usually dressed as mortal mandarins, but Wild gods can be as barbarously arraigned as they wish. Most are of human appearance, although some animals, animal spirits and demons have become gods.

Select your spirit's props. If Civilised, these should hint at the spirit's role. If Wild, these should warn of its offensive capabilities or hint at its powers' flavour.

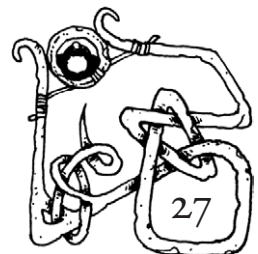
### Might

Titles have been given instead of Chinese names to give an idea of the scope of responsibility for each level of divinity, or potency for each grade of demon. The daily servants of a higher power are often of the Might rank below their master. Huge animated icons in temples dedicated to that shen have a Might one rank below the shen's score. Human-sized icons are two ranks below their representee, and altar figurines three ranks below. Only very powerful spirits can animate paper figures.

Might scores use the following scale.

Up to:

- 10 newly released from the Underworld, minor sickness demon, minor magic animals.
- 15 spirit of a notable local feature, demon of fever or tuberculosis, most minor animal spirits
- 20 minor warrior demon, minor Earth god, spirits reflecting large and combat-worthy animals.
- 25 minor landlord god, Celestial menial, Demon of the Pox, rulers of tribes of animal spirits







- 30 minor Celestial bureaucrat, spirit of a vast natural feature, major warrior demon, demon of the Black Death
- 35 City god, The Great General Who Eats Demons
- 40 General of a Host of Heaven, Spirit of the River at the Centre of the World. Functionary of the Court of the West. Taoist immortal of the Court of the Empress of Heaven, Well Dragon
- 45 River Dragon
- 50 Supreme Commander of Celestial Forces, Any Lohan,
- 55 Dragon of one of the four oceans.
- 60 Demon Lord of One of the Four Quarters, Senior Heavenly Dragons. Jade Emperor. Any Bodhisattva.
- Incalculable Shang-Ti (The Creator of Heaven), any Buddha, Taoist Trinity

### Characteristics

Many spirits are insubstantial and therefore have no physical attributes. Since those who can take on physical form make for better antagonists, consider these guidelines.

Spirit characteristics have a maximum of one third their Might Score, unless the Might Score is 40 or more, in which case they can exceed what the system tolerates. Note that spirits with a maximum score in any trait are rare. Minor animal spirits have attributes identical to their species of origin. Intelligence is an exception to the one-third rule, since few demons seem smarter than the popular gods, and they don't usually exceed Mythic Intelligence.

### Size

For various storytelling reasons, spirits encountered by protagonists are rarely larger than giants (+3), and most are smaller. There are some notable exceptions, especially among the Animal Spirits, but mêlée attacks upon these creatures are futile.

### Weapons and Attacks

Most spirits use weapons, but guei and animal spirits also have fangs and, often, claws to fall back upon if disarmed. Although sometimes enchanted, their weapons are often simply large versions of mortal arms, the equivalent of great weapons used one handed. To calculate the totals for these take the initial values from the weapons table in *Ars Magica* 4th edition (pp. 172-3), adjust for the spirit's Strength and Dexterity then add any enchantment effects. Don't worry about a skill score.

Particularly strong spirits (8+) can use enormous double-handed weapons. To calculate combat totals for these, double the figures in the appropriate Great Weapon entry on the weapons table, then apply characteristics, enchantments and, if the spirit is terrifyingly vicious, a skill score.

Most demons and some animal spirits can bite, which for demons up to size 3 with human shaped jaws is a brawl manoeuvre that removes wound instead of fatigue levels. For animal headed creatures

either find the statistics for the original animal, then apply bonuses based on differing size and characteristics, or guess.

Claw attacks, from spirits of size 3 or less, whose hands are essentially human but with hardened nails, use the "Attack" Brawl manoeuvre, but do wound instead of fatigue damage. For larger spirits, use the claw attacks from the dragon section of the *Ars Magica* 4th edition bestiary as a guide.

Creatures whose size is 3 or more points greater than their enemies gain the +3 bonus for attacking as if mounted or from higher ground.

### Soak

Use the following table to set maximums. Few human-seeming, non-combatant creatures will have maximum scores, but demons, spirits of dangerous predators, animated idols and celestial soldiers have excellent Soak scores.

#### Might

|       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|-------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1-9   | 5 + Sta + armour                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| 10-19 | 10 + Sta + armour                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| 20-29 | 15 + Sta + armour                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| 30-39 | 20 + Sta + armour                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| 40+   | Select individually. Many celestial demons can only be harmed by pearwood weapons. Any Buddhist spirit of Lohot or higher grade is unkillable, although they can theoretically be harmed. Popular religion gods are surprisingly easy to murder. |

### Fatigue

Half stamina. Add extra points for large, embodied spirits.

### Body and Fatigue Levels

5 + 1 per Size. Animated icons do not suffer negative modifiers from being wounded, unless the storyguide rules that limbs have been removed.

### Powers

Vary widely, but Civilised creatures often have rapid movement and flight, to allow them to visit Heaven and receive instructions. Many demons can disincorporate, and both gods and shen can usually possess idols of themselves. Causing ill-luck, or warding against demons who cause ill-luck, are also usual. Major gods and demons can give advice which seems like a prediction of the future, but that is probably because they have a wider view and are wiser than the questioner. They also have the ability to send dreams.

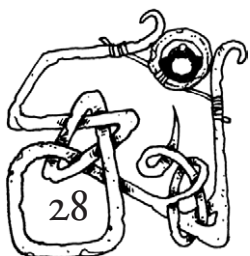
### Vis

Minimum Might/3, higher for spirits with formidable magical powers. Animate idols do not contain vis.

### Example

**Story Function:** To act as a guide, mentor or patron to a group of Western magi in China. To introduce characters to the Chinese spiritual realms.

**Sphere:** Romans in China





**Background and Appearance:** In 33BC the Romans lost an important battle to a raiding group from the steppes. Some of their soldiers were taken as warrior-slaves and transported across Asia, finally founding a city in China, named after Alexandria. Their descendants live in China up to the modern day, and one of them, surviving as a shen, might be attracted to Hermetic magi.

Lucian, a member of the Roman middle class, served as the leader for the tiny contingent of Eastern Romans and is venerated as an ancestor spirit or landlord god by his descendants. His shen form has adapted a little to the beliefs of the Chinese. Remembered for the way his men fought, with shields interlocked in the “fish scale” formation, a Dragon King has given Lucian magically-light, scaly, Romanesque armour, including gauntlets and boots.

Although he is unaware of it, Lucian has caught the attention of certain significant water immortals that feel he’d make a good general. If promoted he’d swap his javelin for a magical trident and gain 5 points of Might. His statistics would also increase.

### Lucian: a major warrior spirit

Characteristics Int: 3, Per: 2, Str: 6, Sta 6, Pre 8, Com 3, Dex 6, Qik 3

Civilised [Magic] Might 30

Size 1

Personality Traits: Disciplined 4, Orderly 3, Fascinated by news of Rome 2, Cares for his troops 3, Cares for descendants 2.

| Weapon/Attack:             | Init | Atk | Dfn | Dmg |
|----------------------------|------|-----|-----|-----|
| Javelin                    | +11  | +12 | +0  | +6  |
| Shortsword & Square Shield | +14  | +17 | +16 | +10 |

Soak: 36 (26 lacking armour)

Fatigue: 14

Fatigue Levels 0/-1/-1/-3/-5/Unconscious

Body Levels 0/-1/-1/-3/-5/incapacitated

Abilities: Shortsword and Shield 8, Javelin 8, many, many others.

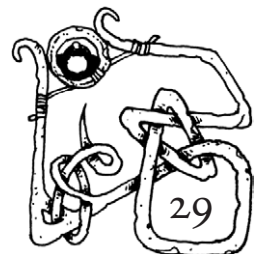
Vis: 10 Rego: tongue.

Powers

- *Command Spirits* [ReVi30: 3 points] Allows Lucian to force Civilised spirits within earshot to obey his verbal commands through magic. Note that he doesn’t usually depend on this ability, preferring to use military discipline and his enormous Presence.
- *Discorporate* [MuCo25: 1 point] Allows Lucian to become intangible and invisible, but requires sufficient concentration that it can’t be used in combat.
- *Possess* [ReHe25, 5 points]: Allows Lucian to animate properly carved images of himself from any distance.
- *Telekinesis* [ReTe15, 1 point]: Lucian can make objects move with his thoughts. He uses this to bring ill luck upon troublemakers he can’t be bothered smiting, and to do odd tricks with his weapons, like making them fly.
- *Travel* [ReCo35, 5 points]: Lucian can travel to Heaven in a few hours, but rarely does. He’s answerable to the City God of the nearest municipality, and can travel to him in a few minutes. He could go to other places, but has never seen the point.

Equipment: Distorted orientalised of Roman cavalry (equitatus) kit, including magically scale-barded Fuchan dragon-horse called Troy, because that joke was still funny in 33BC.

Note that were Lucian fighting a similar creature, he’d have difficulty overcoming his enemy’s Soak. To become a truly effective warrior-spirit, Lucian needs to replace his mortal weapons and use his legionnaires (or the player characters) to wear opponents down.







# Advancing Hermetic Theory Without Unbalancing Your Game

by Tyler Larson

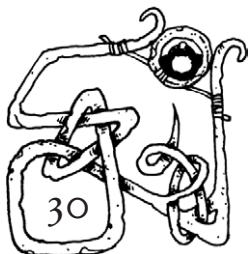
**T**he *Wizard's Grimoire Revised Edition* shows the structure of creating discoveries for *Ars Magica* Fourth Edition. It goes into detail explaining the game mechanics of creating discoveries with a single example. This article is intended to expand upon that with a more in depth approach including additional examples, advice on handling discoveries, and story seeds.

I think that the idea of altering the way magic is “done” is one of the best aspects of *Ars Magica* for it shows a realistic, flawed, and growing magical system that the player characters can actually improve upon. With the right tweaking it is very easy to modify Hermetic theory to allow all sorts of changes, depending on what the storyguide and the troupe wants.

In this article I will show an example for each category of original research, all of which are in use in my Saga. By emphasizing discoveries, I have found that they enrich my game and encourage the player characters with the possibility that they can make a contribution to Hermetic magic. So far only one player has not told me an idea for a discovery that they would like to make. That kind of enthusiasm is something I would like to share with you.

I have created a new category of Original Research called minor discoveries. Minor discoveries are how the majority of those virtues not brought into Bonisagus’s theory by the Founders became part of the fabric of modern Hermetic theory. Many magi whose tradition or lineage was new to the Order developed ideas themselves or worked with eager Bonisagi to create new theories and virtues to increase the value their new House would place upon them. One of the best sources of guaranteed insight to a researcher is correspondence or *disputatio* with foreign magi, because of their differing viewpoint on how magic works. As members of the Order, they have been exposed to enough Hermetic theory to be able to “translate” concepts unique to their old way of magic.

A valid reason to allow discoveries into your game is the incredible number of plot hooks that come with them. A good way to introduce discoveries to beginning characters is to have a trusted elderly magus hire them to track down ingredients, information, books, and test subjects. In an unscrupulous game, a troupe could be agents for hire that steal research, kidnap Bonisagi, and assassinate for those who wish to maintain the status quo.



I hope that the reader will go far beyond my little sketches and, as an aid to that endeavor, I will give some advice.

- 1 Before you allow any magus to pursue a discovery, make sure both of you have a firm grasp of the general rules. That way you can at least guess at the possible ramifications of changing the way magic works.
- 2 Make sure that, as the storyguide, you know how far you will let the player characters push the envelope of the magic system. As storyguide you must be familiar with and have access to the Original Research rules (chapter 8, pages 84 to 88 of the *WGRE*).
- 3 As storyguide, placing limits on original research discoveries that you feel are dangerous can help to maintain game balance. This can encourage the player characters to work in order to use the breakthrough and also to provide a reason why every other magus in the Order doesn’t utilize the new discovery. That is, if you don’t want it ubiquitous within the Order.
- 4 Think carefully about the ramifications of success or defeat in pursuit of the discovery.
- 5 Don’t let the players bully you.
- 6 Don’t forget that any discovery not learned during a player character’s apprentice years must be studied. (As described on page 86 *WGRE*)
- 7 Make an effort to allow the troupe to find guaranteed insight from outside sources if they work hard to find it (as described on page 86 *WGRE*).
- 8 Remember that all the rules are just mechanics and shouldn’t totally dominate the story but instead provide a framework that you as the storyguide use as an aid.
- 9 Have fun, and throw the players for a loop when non-player characters use their discovery against them.

All game mechanic information dealing with the discoveries will be made obvious by use of bullets.

## Optimization

This is a great tool to allow formulaic spells in the books to stay at their level while changing the spell guidelines. Many people I have talked to have complained about *Imaginem* spells, such as invisibility being far too easy, and have told me about all sorts of complicated changes they have made. That’s fine for spontaneous spells or newly invented formulaic spells, but what about the character that is already written up and has used the spells before in game, and as a consequence of the change of guidelines can no longer cast the spell? Optimization! (See pages 83 and 84 of the *WGRE*)

## The Minor Discovery

Those fools! They seek to tear the passion out of magic and make it a cold, dead thing. I will show them that Hermetic magic can be enhanced by us! Come my sisters let us work together and we shall show that Tremere toad what witches can do with magic.

A speech given to her coven after a particularly difficult Tribunal at Stonehenge by Ardrianna filia Aife follower of Ex Miscellanea.

This is something I've created for my game that bridges the gap between the incredibly difficult discoveries below and simply inventing new spells. It is really useful as something that allows the player characters to cut their teeth on something substantial that is within the range of a mature but not overly powerful magus.

Minor discoveries are those that are well within the structure of Hermetic theory but just haven't been developed, such as the first magus who invented Harnessed Magic and other virtues that have spread throughout the order. Basically any discovery that you as the storyguide feel is within easy range is a minor discovery. Remember to err on the high side though, as detailed in the *Wizard's Grimoire Revised Edition*.

Researching minor discoveries uses the same structure as other discoveries with the following differences:

- 1 Developing the initial theory has an ease factor of 12. (See page 85 *WGRE*)
- 2 Three pawns of vis are used during each season's test. (See page 85 *WGRE*)
- 3 The control roll's ease factor is -3. (See page 86 *WGRE*)
- 4 One volume must be written for others to use the discovery. (See page 86 *WGRE*)

The example for this category is making available to the Art of Vim the ancient power of cursing.

By introducing this discovery into an existing game in which magi have the Cursing +4 Virtue, the storyguide could demean its value. A good way to handle that is for the storyguide to provide the research volume as part of an adventure with some curse spells. Also, the storyguide can give the magus formulaic spells of their favorite curses that they have used in the game, as they intuitively know how to "invent" them.

Other ramifications should be minimal and not affect the game overmuch. This is the hallmark of the minor discovery.

- Ritual curses can only be lifted magically by using a Perdo Vim ritual designed to counter rituals.
- Calculate the ease factor of a curse using the rules for cursing in *Land of Fire and Ice* on pages 57 to 59. This total provides the general level of the ritual which can be modified by

changing the basic ranges, durations, and targets as normal.

- The formulaic spells using this discovery must by necessity be generic in some ways. Pick one of the options under Curse Ease Factor modifiers (Base 7) on page 58 of *LoFaI*. Also, pick one of the categories under Conditions for Curses on the same page. Poetic justice is not calculated into the spell level.
- The target of the spell gets a natural resistance roll with an ease factor based on how appropriate the curse is and what it is affecting. A curse that has a poor poetic justice has an ease factor of 6, an average curse has an ease factor of 9, and a suitable curse has an ease factor of 12.
- Depending on what the curse affects, the target uses the appropriate characteristic, such as a curse that makes you clumsy uses Dexterity
- +1 Virtue, Cursing Magic: Non Ex Miscellanea witches may take this discovery at character creation along with curse spells.

An example curse using these rules is shown below.

*The Swordsman's Bane* (CrVi 31)

R: Near, D: Sun/Perm, T: Individual

Spell Focus: A bent dagger (+3)

With this spell a witch curses a warrior to always roll 0 with a single combat skill. The storyguide should judge the appropriateness of the curse on how good a swordsman the target is. The better the swordsman, the higher the natural resistance ease factor. If the target is not using a sword then the ease factor for the natural resistance is lowered one step. The Characteristic used on the natural resistance roll is Dexterity.

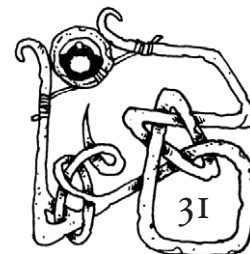
The condition to counter the spell is simply to make an oath to never threaten the witch again.

A botch with this curse will possibly cause a backlash, with the caster being cursed in an appropriate ability until they make an oath to never threaten the original target.

Spell Design: 7 (base) + 14 (single ability always 0) + 0 (easy lifting condition) +10 (changing Range from Touch to Near) = 31.

### Story Seed

A passionate young witch is going around cursing mundanes who offend her. Several magi have disappeared near the area of her covenant possibly because of mundane retaliation against magi. The Quaesitores are currently overwhelmed with too many things to investigate, so as a result ask the player characters to check it out.







## The Major Discovery

Salvete! Callixto filius Artemisia of House Tremere is well known for his martial skill and as a master and champion of Certamen, but until now he has not been known for his magical or inventive skills. With this discovery and the two spells using it, he has opened the potential for every major covenant to have a link to every other major covenant. Think of how this will help our Redcaps in their duties and the possible ramifications to trade, for this is not as beyond the reach of most mature magi as Hermes Portal is. May all know that Callixto of the Line of Muj is in my favour.

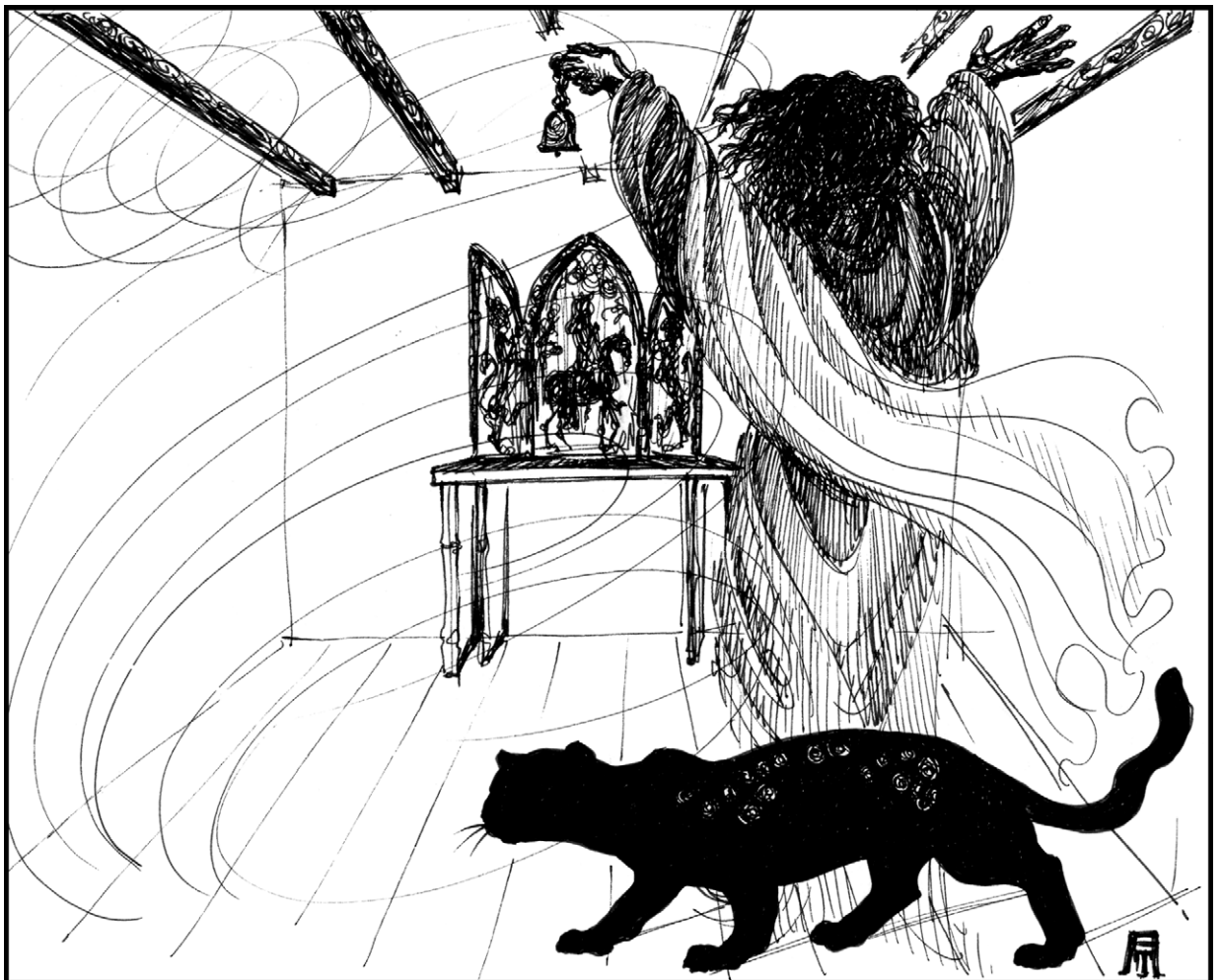
From a missive by Roto Primus of House Tremere to all Tremere in the Order.

This is a major discovery because Callixto has taken a faerie magic Range and incorporated it into normal Hermetic theory. This allows any magi who don't have faerie magic to use the Symbol Range. (See page 136 *WGRE* for information on the Symbol Range)

The reason for Penetration to be a Requisite for spells using this discovery is that an understanding of the connections between things is necessary, for the caster is using that information to help create and maintain the link between the locations that are coming together. Also, by having that as a requisite it encourages higher Penetration scores and makes it a little harder to just jump in and use this magic. Instead it may take some work and some practice before that becomes possible. In addition, on the *Ars Magica Berkeley List* I've heard a few people complain that Penetration doesn't do anything worthwhile and should be eliminated, so here is something that makes it useful.

The ramifications to this discovery are many. If this becomes common then magi will not often travel by mundane means, eliminating several types of stories and exposure to the mundane world. With this, information will spread quickly and easily and might spell the end of House Mercere's usefulness and severely weaken their powerful mercantile base.

- The game mechanics of using this discovery with standard Hermetic magic is that the caster



must have a Penetration score equal to  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the magnitude of the spell.

- This range is equivalent to Arcane Connection because of the above. With faerie magic it is normally two magnitudes higher.
- +2 Virtue, Symbolic Magic: At character creation non-Tremere magi can start with this discovery and spells invented with this range.

Along with this discovery are two linked spells that utilize the Symbol Range below.

*Anchoring the Magical Beacon (ReTe 50)*

R: Symbol, D: Permanent, T: Room, Ritual

Spell Focus: A silver bell with an opal handle (+5)

Requisites: Vim and a Penetration score of 5

This spell uses a precise and complex design (Symbol) to anchor a magical beacon to a specially prepared room. This room must be spare and must be kept as identical as possible to when the spell was originally cast, for the safety of the magi teleporting. A mural, tapestry or even a mandala are appropriate types of anchors though anything will work as long as it is unique and semi-permanent. This ritual creates a magical mirror of the design and the room that resonates with its physical components; this fulfills the requirement that all spells with the Symbol Range have two descriptors. Once this is done, a magus can use The Beacon's Transferral to transmit themselves across vast distances. If the spell focus is used it must be rung during the ritual to align the vibrations of its sound to that of the physical and magical mirrors. Also, the bell may never leave the room; if it does then the spell fails.

When Callixto of the Line of Muj casts this spell, the bell rings and sounds almost like a large cat screaming (or singing as he says) as his sigil is that of a panther.

*The Beacon's Transferral (ReCo 30)*

R: Personal/Touch, D: Momentary, T: Individual

Spell Focus: A miniature copy of the beacon's design (+2)

Requisites: Terram and a Penetration score of 3

This spell allows the caster to teleport to a beacon's location. The caster links to the Symbol/Beacon until they are both in alignment, allowing the transfer. The caster must have a near perfect memory of the Beacon for a successful teleportation.

Often, magi cast *Wizard's Flash of Memory* (InMe 15, page 169 WGRE) before casting this spell to deal with this issue. To completely remember the Symbol without any magical aid requires an Intelligence + Memory\* roll against an Ease Factor of 9. The Virtue Visual Eidetic Memory gives a bonus of +3 to the total (under +3 virtues page 45 ArM4). After spending two minutes focusing on the Symbol, the caster adds their Concentration score to their total.

Beacons that have the Spell Focus have an added safety factor because the silver bell rings before the caster's arrival to warn people out of the room. Failure while casting this spell because of not remembering the symbol, losing concentration

while casting, or any other reason can have very bad consequences.

\*See page 116 of *Kaballah*, or page 94 of *The Mysteries* for more information about the Art of Memory +1 Virtue.

### Story Seed

A faction of magi finds a weakness in the Beacon magic allowing them to pinpoint the teleportation of magi by their sigils. Now they are working on a way to make fake Beacons that will allow them to "hi-jack" any particular magus when they teleport via the Beacon.

## The Extraordinary Discovery

### Excerpts from The Divine Flame by Soliel filius Lumena of House Flambeau

The Tytali have succumbed to the powers of darkness in their ploy for power and we Flambeau have found once again that the demons were immune to our powers. So after my discovery of the papyrus of Lyon with the aid of 7 sodales from Val Negra...

... By tapping into the essential nature of flame with its creative and destructive power in balance, this "true" Fire can harm demons by in effect damaging their very core of being. Since demons are by nature destruction, corruption, and entropy they can't handle the power of creation ripping apart their "caligo"...

... And He of the Sure Hand had given me insight by merging the arts of Iignem and Vim...

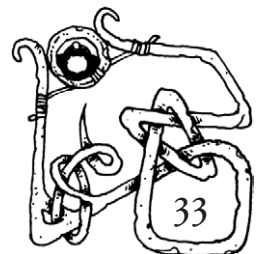
... Now with this discovery, never again will demons dare to challenge the Order for House Flambeau will stop them! As long as we stand together and the Shining One smiles benevolently upon us then diabolists and their masters will cringe in terror...

On page 254 of the Ars Magica 4th Edition Core book it states that demons are completely immune to fire. This discovery changes that "fact".

The Flambeau have always been irritated that any entity could be immune to their greatest power but since they don't have the tendency to be scholars, they have failed to discover a way to bypass infernal defenses. I made the level of discovery extraordinary since it is pushing the limits and because it would have had to be hard to do otherwise it would have already been done.

I like the idea of demons being a little leery of the Flambeau for it partially explains why they don't tend to openly attack too many covenants when it would seem to be in their best interest to eliminate their competition. It also explains how hard the demons try to corrupt House Flambeau and adds a new perspective on the story arc of the Shadow Flambeau from the *Tribunals of Hermes: Iberia* book.

Possible ramifications of allowing this discovery into your game could be as said above: it could cause demons to either flee from or be drawn to Flambeau







magi. Giving the Flambeau the power to defeat demons more easily means they are more likely to underestimate the more intelligent demons with longer viewpoints. Plus Flambeau with their “fiery” personalities may be very vulnerable to Psychomachia. An interesting adventure seed would be demons using a Flambeau magus to eliminate their diabolic enemies without incurring the wrath of the Hierarchy of Hell.

**Divine Flame:** A +5 virtue available through a secret society. This virtue allows the magus to learn or invent Ignem spells that combine with the Vim anti-demonic spells. Both spell effects must be of the same level and the “combined” spell acts as a single normal spell. These spells follow the normal rules on requisites. The storyguide should use common sense in allowing logical combinations of spells. Also, magi with this virtue have a great understanding of the weaknesses of demons and diabolists, allowing them to double their Penetration score with ALL of their magic against the infernally gained.

For example: *Encompassing Ward of Flames* (CrIgReVi 35) a newly invented spell based upon *Circle of Encompassing Flames* (CrIg 35) and *Circular Ward Against Demons* (ReVi 35) cast by a magus with this virtue would have one spell roll and if successful both effects would take place on one target circle. Or a *Pilum of Fire* (CrIg 20) combined with *Demon's Eternal Oblivion* (PeVi 20) would create a new spell *Pilum of Demonic Oblivion* (CrIgPeVi 20) which would weaken a physical demon's Might and do normal spell damage.

- This discovery allows magi to use the Art of Ignem to make “true” flame that harms physical or embodied demons. There are no requirements or requisites to use this breakthrough.
- +1 Virtue, True Flame: Non Flambeau magi may start the game with this discovery.
- -1 Flaw, Impure Flame: Flambeau magi may start without this discovery at character creation.

### Story Seed

What if Soliel didn't make available all the research he had made to everyone? The player characters find part of an old letter in an abandoned church written to a Brother Lucas of the Order of the Apotropaics by Soliel of Flambeau. None of the player characters have heard of such an order. Could these be diabolists or hidden holy magi within the church? (See Insert above)

### Breakthrough Discovery

This is by far the most complex discovery because I “really” didn't want it to be easy at all. The Limit of Creation is the most dangerous to game balance. With all the requirements, it becomes something you could add to a game and few would notice.

But those players that truly want to play healers can more easily do so without hurting the rest of the game. Other ramifications could be that less vis is being used up by healing magics thus increasing the availability of vis to magi, since demand has dropped. Maybe it might even lower the high value of Corpus vis on the Verditius trade network.

Without these restrictions then, magical healing would be much more common and I feel it would lead to the same kind of complacency found in many other role playing games when dealing with injuries. The kind of viewpoint that trivializes the danger of combat such as; “I just got my arm chopped off. Oh well, I still have 10 hit points so I'll just chug a healing potion”. If you have ever taken a serious wound you wouldn't be so casual and cavalier. With my Ars Magica games, the player characters are seriously worried every time they enter combat and at least one of the players mentions that they take a whole chururgeon's kit with healing herbs whenever the troupe travels.

- The core Arts used in healing humans are Creo and Corpus, plus the following requisites. Intellego is used to perceive the nature of the

### A lecture taking place at the Collegium artis Mercurii

Occultes: By perceiving the entirety of an injury and how it relates to the whole of an individual including the four humours of the body, the spirit, the soul, and the very vitality and will, the magus can begin the process of healing without vis! By manipulating with great skill the fluid vis that flows within various patterns, the healer can link with the injury.

Rechnae: As Asclepius himself did, I am sure of it. The healer becomes ‘One’ with the wounded.

Occultes: Exactly. Thus your energy and the target's energy enact a change in the very essence of the target's health. Doing this correctly requires the healer to align the 5 primary organs, the 4 humours and the 3 spirits in such a way that they are in harmony. This actually removes the injury from existence and, as the healer is not forcing change, this discovery actually allows a permanent altering of a pattern without the actual expenditure of vis! At the end of the spell, the healer must break the connection to the target in order to prevent an accidental backlash.

Rechnae: Often when I am tapping into the radiant vis that is the Goddess's blessing, a glow will radiate from my hands.

Occultes: Yes! I think it is a byproduct of the drain of negative or harmful energy with the replacement of new, positive, healing energy. In a few of the test cases, my face was oddly lit up and was described as angelic by the patient.

Occultes and Rechnae: We hope that this breakthrough is beneficial to the Order and to the prestige of the Houses Bonisagus and Bjornaer. Now we shall show you how it works.



injury and to sense the fluid vis, Muto to allow slight shifts in the target's pattern like altering blood flow, Rego to direct the flow of bodily energy, and Vim to allow the manipulation of radiant and fluid vis.

- To utilize this breakthrough requires that the spell must be formulaic and incorporate the breakthrough. This means the formulaic spell must have been invented using the discovery. The caster must know the discovery either because of being an apprentice of one who knows it or because he or she has studied books on the topic.
- To be able to cast any spell utilizing this breakthrough, the magus must have Finesse and Medicine scores equal to the magnitude of the spell. In addition the caster must have a Magic Theory score of 3 + the magnitude of the spell. This is because you must be able to understand how the human body works and be able to do the fine manipulation of magic required, all of which combines with an advanced knowledge of how and why magic works.
- In order to link the healer to the target, body energy must be spent. One Fatigue level is spent to cast any spells utilizing this breakthrough. This is in addition to any fatigue that might be spent through failure of matching the spell level with your casting total.
- All fatigue spent while utilizing this breakthrough is considered long term exertion.
- All Body levels healed through this breakthrough require a loss of a matching Fatigue level by either the healer or the target.
- While casting any spell that utilizes this breakthrough, the healer must take one minute per magnitude of the spell to study the injury, so as to learn how and what needs to be done. If the healer is interrupted at any time during this process, the spell must be cast again, though no fatigue is lost, because the link to the target has not yet been made.
- Any spell utilizing this breakthrough requires the healer to use the Touch Range.
- When casting one of these spells, the caster may begin to glow in strange ways and places. This could interact with your sigil and create some interesting effects.
- +4 Virtue, Magical Healer: At character creation magi may start with this discovery and may have invented spells utilizing it. The character starts with a Medicine score of 4 and a Finesse score of 4.

For Example, *Bind Wound* (page 122 ArM4) using this discovery:

*Bind Wound* (CrCo 10)

R: Touch, D: Instant, T: Individual

Requisites: Intellego, Muto, Rego, and Vim Arts. Medicine and Finesse scores of 2 and a Magic Theory score of 5.

Spell Focus: A poultice of healing herbs bound within a spider's web (+3)

After casting the spell and studying an injury for two minutes with Intellego magics and then by placing your hands onto the injury, the healer draws in the radiant vis coming down from the heavens and creates a link between the healer and the injured target. The fluid vis within the target is directed by you to seal and thus stabilize the injury as you slowly pass your hand over the wound. Any subsequent recovery rolls necessitated by the wound are made at +1. One long-term Fatigue level is lost to create the link to the target.

### Story Seed

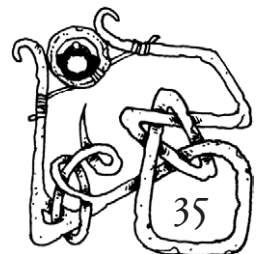
The Asclepiads learn this discovery and start a massive healing campaign. Now that precious vis doesn't have to be spent on healing, the strongest of the secret society can heal much more than a dozen people a week from horrible afflictions. Because of the "glowing" side effect, many of the cured think of the magi as saints or angels.

The Quaesitores are investigating this and seem overly pleased with any information provided about this situation because of its possible violation of the Code. After the investigation, all the Asclepiads are forced to cease the healing campaign or face trial. Then a couple of years later, a rash of murders takes place and the player characters find out they were all Asclepiads. What if the player characters had been friends or allies of the Asclepiads? Will they care or let the Quaesitores handle it?

### Conclusion

Allowing discoveries to be a part of your game, I feel, enriches the world created by the storyguide whether the player characters are changing that world or that world is changing independent of the player characters. For Mythic Europe is a living, breathing and "realistic" world that moves and shapes the environment the troupe finds themselves in and allows the player characters to interact and alter history itself. With such a grand theme, why leave the very best aspect of the game static and boring? In fact I propose that even if you are hesitant to allow major discoveries into your game, you make an effort to show the use of and gossip about minor discoveries, new spells, new items and even old artifacts to breathe a richer fabric into the weave of your interpretation of Mythic Europe.

As you can see, with the clever use of requirements even a discovery breaking a Limit can be made without totally changing the way *Ars Magica* is played. Hopefully with these examples and my suggestions, you will have the know-how to carefully allow discoveries into your game. I would like to thank Alexander White for his advice and Sheila Thomas for her fine editing. Good Luck!







# Omnibus Grimoire

## Scroll VI: Ignem

by Andrew Gronosky

Honored Colleagues and Brother Magicians,

**I**t is with pleasure that I offer for your enjoyment and edification this sixth scroll in my collection of lesser-known spells from the libraries and grimoires of the Order. It is my humble aspiration that by circulating these spells among the Order at large, I may encourage a renewed interest in the compilation and dissemination of formulaic spells.

The Form of Ignem is avidly studied by certain specialists; indeed the House of Flambeau is almost as strongly associated with Ignem as is the House of Bjornaer with Animal. Yet because of its usefulness as a weapon, the Form of Ignem is sometimes disdained as the purview of the violent and unsubtle. This is a disservice both to our sodales in House Flambeau, and to the Form of Ignem itself. Those who scoff at Ignem as good for nothing but fighting and destruction overlook the simple fact that light and heat are essential to life itself. How can one dis-

dain the candle that enables us to study after sunset, or the brazier that serves us in so many of our arcane experiments? Indeed, the Form of Ignem has myriad uses beyond the battlefield, as I hope to demonstrate with these few humble examples.

May these spells reach you in good health, and prove useful to you in your studies and travels.

Your colleague and servant,

**Jarius of House Mercere**

### Creo Ignem

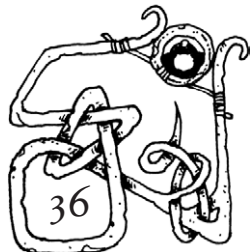
*Warmth of the Summer Sun (CrIg 4)*

R: Near, D: Sun/Moon, T: Individual/Group

Spell Focus: Sunflower Petals (+1)

Keep a person or creature comfortably warm, regardless of the air temperature. This spell is cancelled if the subject is affected by magical cold, such as a Perdo Ignem spell. At the storyguide's discretion, other extreme cold conditions, such as falling into frigid water, may also cancel the spell. Sunflower petals represent the sun itself, and aid in the casting though the Law of Sympathy.

Design: Heat an object so it is warm to the touch, Level 1. Increase Duration to Sun (+2 magnitudes) and Target to Individual (+1 magnitude).



### *Arrow of Flame (CrIg (Re) 10)*

R: Near, D: Diameter, T: Small/Group

Requisite: Rego

Spell Focus: A pinch of sulfur (+2)

Cause a torch-sized flame to spring from the head of an arrow, spear, or javelin. The fire does not consume the arrow (hence the Rego requisite) but it can ignite combustibles that the arrow strikes. A living creature hit by a flaming arrow takes +5 fire damage in addition to the damage caused by the arrow itself (fire damage is described on ArM 4, p. 180). This magical flaming arrow is much more effective than a mundane flaming arrow because its flame is hotter and bigger.

Design: Create a fire doing +5 damage, Level 5. Increase Duration to Diameter (+1 magnitude). Add a Rego requisite to prevent the arrow being burned up.

## Intellego Ignem

### *Discern Flame from Figment (InIg 15)*

R: Sight, D: Momentary, T: Individual

Spell Focus: A bit of foxfire (+3)

Identify the source of any single light you see. The storyguide should describe the light source in one or two words, such as “A torch,” “A lighted window,” “sunlight,” “a faerie,” and so on. If there are multiple light sources, you learn only the brightest. If the light source is a magical being, you must overcome its Magic Resistance to get any information. In spite of its title, this spell affects light, not fire. Obviously, this spell is most helpful when it is dark.

The origin of this spell is unknown but the manuscript from which it was copied notes that its original intent was to distinguish faerie tricks from the lights of mortal civilization, to prevent traveling magi from being led astray.

Design: Learn one property of light (treated similarly to learning one property of flame), Level 4. Increase Range to Sight (+3 magnitudes), reduce Duration to Momentary (-1 magnitude), and increase Target to Individual (+1 magnitude).

### *Sense the Intruding Flame (InIg 25)*

R: Touch/Special, D: Sun/Year, T: Boundary

Spell Focus: A parchment map or drawing of the target area (+2)

You magically become aware of any fire that is started within or brought into the target Boundary. You know the fire’s source, location, size, and how fast it is growing. You must remain within the Boundary or the spell is cancelled, unless you use raw vis to boost Range. In that case, you may move anywhere as long as you keep an Arcane Connection to a place inside the Boundary. This spell can be useful in guarding a magical forest from accidentally (or intentionally) being burned down, or making sure your apprentice doesn’t incinerate the laboratory when you’re not looking. Some covenants use this spell with boosted Range and Duration to protect their libraries: the combination of large amounts of

parchment and magi who like to study by candlelight is a hazardous one.

If you use the spell focus, a small image of the fire (visible to you only) appears on the map or drawing.

Design: Learn all mundane properties of a fire, Level 5. Decrease Range to Touch (-1 magnitude), increase Duration to Sun (+1 magnitude), and increase Target to Boundary (+4 magnitudes)

## Muto Ignem

### *Light of the Shining Beacon (MuIg 5)*

R: Reach/Sight, D: Sun, T: Small

Spell Focus: A piece of sunstone (+2)

Double the light of a Small fire, such as a lamp flame or a torch. The light illuminates twice the normal radius and can be seen from twice as far away at night. The sunstone helps augment the brightness of the fire through the Law of Sympathy.

Design: Change a fire so it is slightly unnatural, Level 5. Increase Duration to Sun (+1 magnitude) and decrease Target to Small (-1 magnitude).

### *Flames of Infernal Heat (MuIg 10)*

R: Near/Sight, D: Concentration/Sun, T: Individual

Spell Focus: A bellows (+2)

Increase the heat of a fire to such a degree that it does damage as if it were one category larger; for instance, a torch would do damage as a campfire, or a campfire would do damage as a bonfire. (Fire damage is described on ArM 4, p. 180.) The fire cannot become hotter than molten lava, which is hot enough to melt bronze (but not iron). The actual size of the fire is unchanged. The additional heat also has other reasonable effects, such as helping the fire ignite harder-to-burn materials. Hotter fires also burn faster and spread faster than normal fires, at the storyguide’s discretion. Once the spell duration expires, the fire returns to its normal temperature.

Design: Change a fire so it is slightly unnatural, Level 5. Increase Range to Near (+1 magnitude).

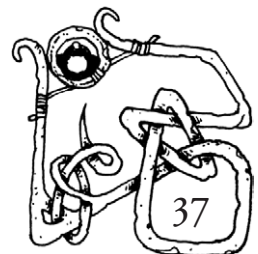
### *Wondrous Unquenchable Fire (MuIg 15)*

R: Reach/Near, D: Sun, T: Small

Spell Focus: Fish oil (+1)

Enchant a small fire so it can burn underwater. The fire will still burn normally above water, but of course it cannot be put out by water and it will burn any fuel, no matter how wet. Underwater, the smoke from a fire takes the form of a stream of smoke-filled bubbles. If the fire grows larger than Small size (the size of a campfire), the spell ends.

One of the obstacles to underwater exploration, besides the obvious need to breathe, is the need for light in the murky depths. This spell originated in the covenant of Llyn Ffawd, a highly enchanted covenant in the Stonehenge Tribunal that was completely underwater (reports disagree on whether this covenant still exists). It was invented by the mad wizard Eresk-ar, who subsequently titled himself







“Prometheus to the Fishes.” This spell is among the most practical of Eresk-ar’s many inventions.

Design: Change a fire so it is completely unnatural, Level 10. Increase Duration to Sun, +1.

## Perdo Ignem

*Quench the Perilous Flames (PeIg 15)*

R: Near, D: Momentary, T: Individual

Spell Focus: A cupful of water (+1)

Extinguish any fire up to the size of a bonfire. This spell has recently been rediscovered in a long-forgotten grimoire in Val-Negra covenant. It enjoys great popularity, as it is helpful in controlling both laboratory accidents and the effects of wayward Creo Ignem spells. A variant of this spell exists with Target: Structure (*Quench the Raging Conflagration*, Level 25). If using the spell focus, throw it toward the fire.

Design: Extinguish a fire, Level 5. Increase Range to Near (+1 magnitude) and increase Target to Individual (+1 magnitude).

*Mansion of Chill and Darkness (PeIg 20)*

R: Touch, D: Momentary, T: Structure

Spell Focus: A candle snuffer (+2)

Instantly extinguish all non-magical fires and light sources inside the target Structure. Large fires, such as an uncontrolled fire that may be burning down the building, are not affected.

Design: Extinguish a fire, Level 5. Increase Target to Structure (+3 magnitudes).

*Enchantment of the Black Flames (PeIg 25)*

R: Reach, D: Sun, T: Individual

Spell Focus: A black cloth (+1)

Eliminate the light of a fire, changing the flames from orange and yellow to shades of grey and black. The heat of the fire is unaffected. The fire will remain hot but dark no matter how large it grows; seeing a bonfire or house fire affected by this spell is very eerie. Any new fires kindled from the dark fire, such as a torch lighted from it, are nonmagical and give off light as normal. If using the spell focus, throw the cloth over the fire to symbolically conceal its brightness.

Design: Destroy one aspect of a fire, Level 10. Increase Duration to Sun (+2 magnitude) and increase Target to Individual (+1 magnitude).

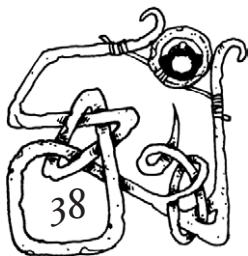
## Rego Ignem

*Deflect the Fiery Missiles (ReIg General)*

R: Personal, D: Concentration, T: Individual

Spell Focus: A shield (+2)

Fire spells are among the most common spells of attack known to the Order, so it is not surprising that a few specific spells have been designed as countermeasures. As long as you maintain this spell, you may deflect one hostile Ignem spell per round, as long as it uses some kind of medium to deliver damage rather than targeting you directly. For example, you could deflect damage from Pile of Fire or Arc of Fiery Ribbons, but not Winter’s Icy Touch because the latter affects you directly. You must be aware of



the hostile spell, the spell must be of equal or lower level, and you must beat your opponent’s Targeting roll with a Quickness + Finesse roll of your own.

This spell was invented by Karsus, an early Archmage of House Flambeau, as a defense in case he ever fought Wizards’ War against a member of his own House. For generations, it was a guarded secret among Karsus’s descendents, but in the twelfth century it was “leaked” into common circulation.

Design: There are no applicable spell guidelines, but that should never stand in the way of a good idea. The ad hoc rule for this spell was “Gen: Deflect an Ignem spell of level lower than this spell’s Level – 5.” Decrease Range to Personal (–2 magnitude) and increase Target to Individual (+1 magnitude), so the effect becomes “deflect an Ignem spell of level lower than this spell’s Level.”

*Enchantment of the Finicky Flames (ReIg 20)*

R: Reach, D: Sun, T: Individual

Requisite: Muto

Spell Focus: A bit of asbestos (+3)

Change a fire so it can burn only one kind of material, which you specify when you cast the spell. The fire does no damage to anything other than that material, so you can (for instance) walk safely through an enchanted fire that can only burn wood. The fire continues to burn its current fuel but will not spread or burn new fuel unless it comes in contact with the correct material.

Asbestos is a rare material that does not burn. According to legend, Charlemagne had a tablecloth of asbestos and he would throw it into a fire to clean it.

Design: Control a fire in a slightly unnatural fashion, Level 10. Increase Duration to Sun (+1 magnitude) and increase Target to Individual (+1 magnitude).

*The Obedient Fire (ReIg 25)*

R: Near, D: Concentration, T: Special

Spell Focus: A ruby (+3)

Control the movement and spread of a fire. You can make it move slowly in a certain direction, make it burn its way up a wall, prevent it from harming certain things, cause it to shrink or grow (subject to available fuel), and so on. You cannot make the fire move in a way a natural fire cannot move (for instance, you cannot make it cross water or leap through the air).

Fires are notoriously difficult to control. If the fire gets large enough, controlling it may become overwhelmingly complicated. Use a Per + Concentration stress roll to maintain control. For each thing you are trying to make the fire do (or not do), add +3 to the difficulty. Once the fire reaches the size of a house fire, it escapes your control completely and the spell ends.

The ruby gives control over fire.

Design: Control a fire in a slightly unnatural fashion, Level 10. Increase Range to Near (+1 magnitude) and treat target as equivalent to Room (+2 magnitudes).

# The Art of History

by Alexander White

**W**hat is history? In Mythic Europe, history is the ineffable expression of God's will upon the world. God and the Divine are real, and they make themselves known and felt by influencing events. Every event from the Creation to the Crucifixion occurred for the very specific ends: the Second Coming, a real, inevitable and promised event. Interpretation of history involved attempting to glean the will of God in order to understand the Divine Plan.

The following is an excerpt from a fragmentary letter penned by an unknown Hermetic scholar to his friend, Ambrose of House Jerbiton. Researchers believe it was written shortly before the Schism War, but the letter was never delivered.



## Libellus ex Tempore

To Ambrose, my dear friend and comrade.

In response to your request for my views on history, I have prepared for you a short pamphlet on the topic in the hope that it will enlighten and inspire you. Due to an on going laboratory experiment, I am unfortunately unable to delve into the detail you desired, and I hope this summary will suffice until I have more time.

### What is history?

As we are told, the world is comprised over the World Spirit, the emanation of the second hypostasis of The Unconditioned. The world can be said to comprise of the All-Soul in that it is the first movement of the universe, the eternal cause of existence; all of the creation is its shadow. It is the sound made of all human speech, the concourse of all songs.

Study of history, then, can be said to be the ultimate contemplation of the Divine Circle. It is the expression, or movement, of the World Spirit, played out upon the receptive and inert matter of earth. Human action within this is unknowing communica-

tion and aspiration; every being desires to create an image of itself in the shadow of the Higher Being.

Through application of our Reason, we are able to glimpse the threads or marks of passage left by the All Soul. This is what Cicero meant when he said that history is the witness that testifies to the passage of time. Because the All-Soul identifies with the highest principle of human existence, we can perceive the reality of existence and remember that knowledge to provide guidance to our daily life. Just as the Universal Soul is present always and everywhere, so too is history a continuous never-ending passageway from our past to our present. The two, past and present, are linked perpetually as we are to the Infinite.

The record of history seeks to record the human experience. In those records are set plainly for all to see, yourself, your countrymen, heroes and villains, kings and peasants, follies and wisdom. History is knowledge, and through the interpretation of experience, it is translated into wisdom. Human self-knowledge, that is, knowledge gained through examination of the history of humanity through the faculty of Reason, grants the historian understanding of the Divine.

To know history means to know oneself as a person, and the understanding of the type of person one is as unique from all others. This self-knowledge grants awareness of one's capabilities. Since no one can know what they are truly capable of until they do it, the only clue we are given is what has already been done. History then teaches us what we are capable of by telling us what others have done.

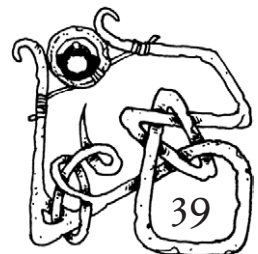
Through history, then, we learn what humanity is, and through this wisdom, we can perceive the Absolute. History therefore is a record, consciously or unconsciously, of our own position in time, comprised of the accumulation of information or knowledge.

### The Historian

To digress briefly, the historian must both emancipate himself from history, and simultaneously immerse himself entirely. The historian yields to history, since to resist it would be to resist himself and the Infinite. By becoming one with the past however, the historian stands apart from it, viewing it as an internal outsider. In so doing, the historian experiences history and gains knowledge of it. The function of the historian therefore is to understand the past, and through this comprehension, master it. Because history eternally flows from past to present, mastery of the past gives dominion over the present.

### Historical Knowledge

How can we gain historical knowledge? Indeed, what makes up knowledge? Fundamentally, we know things for certain because of facts. Facts are the raw material of the historian and of history. Facts are used by the historian to form conclusions, but in and of themselves, facts are distinct from those historical conclusions. They are experience. By applying our Reason to our Experience, we gain historical







knowledge. Importantly, we must dispel the notion of knowledge being innate. One is not born with all the facts, and it is only through gaining those facts that we can gain knowledge.

### Experience

We experience things with our soul, through the principle of the Animate in which lies Sense-Perception. Our faculties of perception are unable to grasp more than the impressions of sensible objects. Sensibility is a mere phantom of the Intelligible, that thing close to the Authentic Existence, the Ideal Form. By means of this, our soul wields lordship over the Animate. Through discursive reasoning, we can perceive the truth of objects although our mean senses can fathom only its basest nature.

It is therefore evident that we experience something outside of ourselves. The act of sensing is passive, and belongs to the physical world. The act of experiencing something in this way can be called sensation, and it is here that we accept the ideas of hardness, colour, loudness, taste, temperature and so on. Reflective experience is distinct, and is formed by our own internal experience, the sensation of the self. From this reflection comes awareness, remembrance, thought, and imagination.

Everything we know and believe is formed from reflection and sensation. Experiences such as pleasure, existence, unity, are formed when the two, reflection and sensation, combine. However, it is fundamental that nothing can be known without first being sensed.

### Reason

Plato has distinguished between logos and mythos: an explicit rational account that combines with belief to form accurate knowledge of a thing's essence; and a story with figurative significance. As it is written, Reason is the intellectual ability to apprehend the truth. We understand now that reason does not require belief to be rational. Reason combined with experience gives us knowledge of the essence of a thing. Reason encapsulates the subsumption of all concepts of rules of comprehension, of conception and of judgement. To use one's reason is to flex that part of the soul that is characteristic to the normal nature of humanity. Its act is Discursive, knowing not through the instantaneous or unmediated True Knowledge of the Intellective Soul, but through experience of sensation and judgement of those senses.

It is clear that access to Reason is not innate, although all have the capacity for reason. This is in the same way that we are all connected via our Intellective Soul to the Universal Soul, but to access it, a life of philosophical morality is needed to identify oneself with his own higher principle. By observing the actions of children, or those who are dull or idiotic, we witness that reason is not innate, as they have no apprehension or thought within them. They have souls and minds, but reason is not imprinted on them. Although the Rational Soul is a part of all, it is

separable from the Life-Principle and like the Intellective, need not be an innate part of a person.

### Making History

By thinking of and recording history, we make it. History therefore is a construct of the mind, distinct from the processes, the events and activities that resulted in the thought. There are consequences of this, as human agency constructs the past as continuously as the future transforms into the present. We must remember that where it is written that the Word caused existence, it refers to the conceived word: the Idea, Logos, or the Second Principle. This ability to transform ideas into actuality is one of the greatest gifts granted to us; intellection becomes reality. Through our consideration we cause history to be made.

### The Dialectic

The dialectic of history is the realisation of a single, simple essence, as reflected in the various parts of the whole, making up society and, obviously, history. This is of course the end result of the dialectic: the Absolute. To reach this state of unity however, history goes through a process of conflict, and the forces coming into conflict are opposing ideas. Resultant of this conflict is a synthesis of ideas, which in turn comes into conflict with another idea or ideas, and so on, until a final, perfect idea is reached.

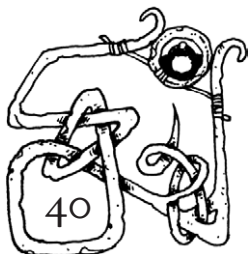
This can be seen in evidence from the past. Ideas of polytheism came into conflict with that of a single supreme divinity. The resultant synthesis of these two ideas was the Hellenistic henotheism of Plato and the Greek philosophers. Society has also undergone changes through dialectical change, moving from the Roman Imperium to the current order of the Divine Right of Monarchs.

It is important to remember that this dialectic is not always taking us to a higher state, and it occurs neither easily, simply nor smoothly; it is combined but uneven. As we know, concepts of polytheism and pantheism still remain today, with veneration of spirits and faeries. So too does the slave-based society of Rome still linger in some parts of the world, contiguous with the vassalage of feudal relations. Furthermore, it is clear that the conflict between the Christian Western Empire and the pagan barbarian invaders resulted in a decline rather than a forward moving historical process.

The dialectic of history is a battle between opposing ideas, with victory never certain between any given higher or lower idea. Ultimately however, history is taking us to an End. The supremacy, for a time, of baser concepts merely forestalls and delays that End; it cannot prevent it.

### Can we know anything?

Do we draw conclusions from the facts, or do we have conclusions to which the facts fit? Is there a separation between subject and object? Clearly a fact is an experience as distinct from conclusions. History could therefore be said to consist of a corpus of



ascertained facts. We of course accept that knowledge of a thing (whether event, object or idea) is not independent of the mind that knows it. One of the fundamental principles is of names for example demonstrates that knowledge of something's name grants deep knowledge of the possessor of the name. By existence independent of the mind, what is meant is an unknown reality. As it is proven, the only true unknown reality belongs to the Absolute; we can know anything else by use of our Intellect as those things are part of the created world.

What this means is that object and subject are linked, just as our Intellect and our bodies are linked. They are not one and the same; they are distinct, but they form a unity. In the case of facts, we make a distinction between an experience — something external that affects us — and our conclusion derived from that experience — the internal process of gaining knowledge from that experience. We can therefore objectively know something.

### Objections

Many of my opponents have posed to me that that we can never truly know something outside our own minds. Any reality independent is unknowable and therefore subjective. This is trivially true, in that by definition we cannot know the unknown, because as soon as we know something, it becomes known. When I talk of independence of the mind, I of course refer to our own minds, and to objects and events that exist whether or not they are known. We must remember of course our first principles: that the world is comprised of the World Spirit, and is known by the First Mind. Both of these exist whether or not anyone is aware of them. They are our objective, independent reality, forming both the known and the unknown.

### Esoteric Colleges

There are two esoteric colleges who have a special interest in the study of history. They are the College of the Light, and the Academy of Reason. Both College and Academy are linked, as the Academy was formed during the ninth century when certain members split from the College over a disagreement over the organisation's objectives. The majority of those who split lived or were trained in Egypt or the Middle East; those remaining in the College were Hellenistic and Italian, with a few Spaniards. It should be remembered that members of both the Academy and the College are very few in number, totalling no more than twenty-five members at most. Nevertheless, most members are over one hundred years old, and include two or three arch-mages.

### The College of the Light

The College of the Light is a fraternity whose members seek to make a complete and entirely accurate record of history, from beginning to end. To this end, they are among the Order's most erudite researchers in Intellego magic aimed at looking into the past. Collegial members aim to use their knowledge of humanity to gain an intimate knowledge of

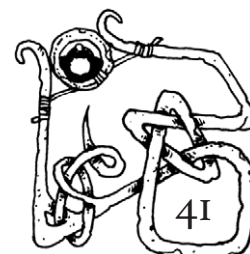
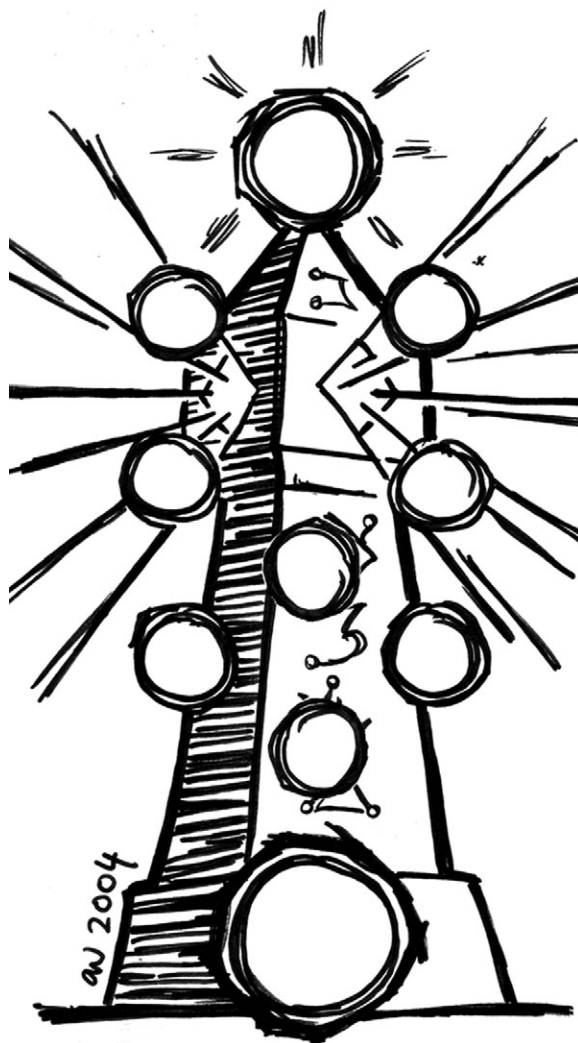
themselves, and thus of the Mind of God. Unlike many other theoreticians who attempt this through either their Intellect or Reason, these Collegians seek to use knowledge to gain enlightenment.

It is believed by many within House Bonisagus that certain members of the College of the Light managed to break the Hermetic Limit of Time, not only to be able to more clearly and easily witness the past, but to also affect it with magic. Currently in the Greater Alpine and Rhine Tribunals, there is a major attempt by House Bonisagus to determine the validity of this claim and to force the College to release this discovery. These rumours are strengthened by claims that a century ago the most senior Collegians, in order that the discovery not be leaked, purged the few members of House Bonisagus who were in the College.

**Symbol:** The Lighthouse of Alexandria

**Motto:** Ab Initio Exactus (From Beginning to End)

**Membership/House Affiliation:** Flambeau, Guernicus, Jerbiton. Membership is made up primarily of scholars engaged in deep and protracted study; however, most members make an attempt to be kept aware of current trends and events. Thus most members maintain close links with House Mercere and







may interact with networks of informants, in addition to remaining in contact with each other.

**Goals and Practices:** The College of Light believes that it is possible and even desirable to create a complete record of history. This involves scrupulous and exacting study of every available historical resource, although largely concentrating on textual remains. Many members go out of their way to track down manuscripts believed lost, and most have gone on explorations of ancient ruins, or excavated areas in cities or settlements in order to learn more about the events that occurred there. After the examination of the evidence however, the Collegians will generally write about their discoveries and release them to other members for debate and comment. The result is often heated arguments between two opposing viewpoints as to the precise order or sequence of events or causes, which has seen one major schism within the College (the formation of the Academy of Reason), but more often long-term grudges and bitterness.

**Hierarchy:** There is no formal hierarchy within the College of Light, since most members are old, venerable and magically mighty. Respect is gained through the proclamation to other members of new discoveries or insights, and also by the number of published manuscripts that have been disseminated to other members. In the past the College of Light followed the teacher-pupil hierarchy; while this is still common, it has been absorbed into the *parens-filii* system used by the Order of Hermes at large.

**Virtues Taught:** Affinity with Intellego, Affinity with Mentem, Art of Memory, Pious or Natural Magic (suggest Erik Dahl's *Deus Ex Magica* in HP#3)

### Academy of Reason

Like the College of the Light, the Academy of Reason seeks to make an accurate record of history. The Academy however believes that through complete knowledge of history, the laws governing human behaviour can be gleaned, and controlled. Within the Academy exists a small faction that holds that this knowledge will not only grant them control

over humanity (using history as a powerful arcane connection), but using the idea of humanity as microcosm, they will be able to control God!

Because of their long contact with non-Hermetic wizards and sorcerers, the Academy is on the cusp of integrating into Hermetic magic certain aspects of non-Hermetic theory. The most important of these is the *sahir's* ability to gain Familiarity with spirits. One particular Academy member believed he managed to gain a Familiarity with God. His sudden and dramatic disappearance during the Siege of Damietta in Egypt has caused many within and without the Academy to ask what precisely he had discovered, and why he disappeared. More important for some within the Academy is the possibility of discovering his notes, lost during the siege. Rumours insist that the notes have managed to find their way south into Upper Egypt, although details are obviously vague.

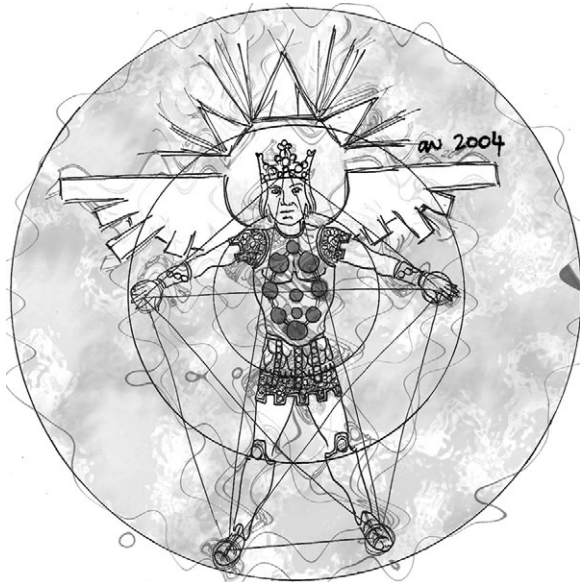
**Symbol:** A human figure encompassed by three concentric circles

**Motto:** De Facto Deo (Existing in Fact and God)

**Membership/House Affiliation:** Membership within the Academy is very selective, and for the past century has stagnated as older members are unwilling to open the doors to new members. Most active members belong to House Cramon, Ex Miscellanea, and Tremere, and reside primarily in the Middle East, or at least originate from there.

**Goals and Practices:** The goals and practices of the Academy of Reason are among the most secretive of the Order. A larger part of the Academy wishes to use an accurate record of history in order that they may gain control over the Laws of Nature, following the premise that knowledge of something grants power over it. Since this goal would violate the Code's prohibition on interfering with mundanes, the Academy keeps all of its activities very closely guarded. Most of their members therefore are vocal campaigners on the issue of the inviolate nature of the sanctum. A much smaller and more militant group within the Academy believes that the same laws that govern humanity can be used to grant power over God. This concept is obviously heretical (even more so than the beliefs of both the Academy and College of the Light) and would certainly endanger not only the Academy, but also the Order itself were news of this desire somehow to manage to leak out to the Church. The Academy's practices are nearly identical to the College of the Light, in that they engage in study of sources and often engage in fieldwork and hands-on investigation.

**Hierarchy:** More so than the College from which it derived, the Academy maintains a strict order based on the supremacy of age and sagacity. The oldest member of the Academy is referred to as 'Father' (regardless of the mage's gender), and has the responsibility of educating his 'Sons'. Members call each other 'Brothers' (regardless of gender), with younger brothers expected to respect and obey their



older brothers, and older brothers in turn supposed to protect and provide for their younger brothers.

**Virtues Taught:** Affinity with Intellego, Penetration Mastery, Art of Memory, Hermetic Theurgy

## Conclusion: A Manifesto

This article is an exercise in anachronism. It takes various views on history, empiricism, positivism and dialectics, mixes those with a dose of Neo-platonism, and puts them in an *Ars Magica* context (it also makes use of some atrocious Latin). In a nutshell, certain historians believed that by experiencing and interpreting events in the present and past, the universal laws of human nature could be discovered. According to positivists, there are only two sources of knowledge, logical reasoning (such as mathematics) and empirical experience. Positivists, as philosophers of science, held that genuine theories of history must include laws that can be used to predict future events, in the same way that astronomers use the laws of motion to predict the movements of astral bodies. Empiricism (from the Greek *empeiria*, ‘experience’) is likewise predicated on all knowledge descending from experience, or that it derives from foundational concepts known intuitively from reason. Dialectics assumes a conflict of two (or more) competing ideas, the thesis and antithesis, which come into opposition and produce the synthesis, which in turn becomes the thesis, confronted by an antithesis and produces another synthesis. This process was guided and personified the Spirit of the Times, whose culmination results in the self-awareness of humanity, based on the realisation of the truths of incarnation, death, resurrection and forgiveness, among other things. Neoplatonism, the last attempt of paganism to ‘rehabilitate’ itself in the third century, developed a henotheistic doctrine of a Unified Triadic diety whose emanations comprised the totality of existence. Originating in Egypt, Neoplatonism drew its inspiration from various treatises

by Plato; the most influential Neoplatonist was Plotinus, and from his works (primarily ‘The Enneads’) and those of his disciples developed the praxis of theurgy.

It should of course be noted that none of the above is in any way representative of medieval thought or philosophy. The notion of history in the thirteenth century is debatable and vague. Medieval scholars probably did not espouse Enlightenment concepts of reason and experience, and it is not likely that they ascribed to Neoplatonic concepts of the Soul or of God (although Neoplatonic influences are present in St. Augustine, Thomas Aquinas and others).

As noted, this article’s goal was anachronism, and to show that historicity in *Ars Magica* is a flexible concept at best. Under debate for over a century (at least) is the very notion of what history is, what facts are, and how we can know things. When presented with the notion that ‘medieval people did or did not do or believe or practice this or that’, it would be wise to challenge its philosophical underpinnings. Just how can we know what happened in the thirteenth century?

Given this, I believe that *Ars Magica* should definitely experiment in anachronism more. The game and setting are already unhistorical, and make use of a fantastical magical system, not to mention that the assumption of the existence of magic and the supernatural. Fetishism of historical facts, historicity and accuracy should be avoided or even abandoned. We should strive for comprehension, coherence, continuity, and above all, fun.

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## Mystery Riddle

Birth in the foam of the sea,  
Beauty in thought and memory,  
Journey, the grand destiny.

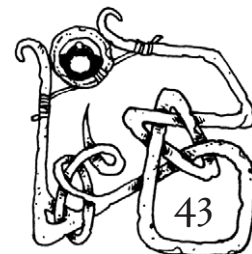
Burned, consumed in flames.  
Rebirth from the ashes,  
Awakening in the smoke.

Escaping from the mundane,  
Serious Upuaut opens the way,  
Ever faithful to the divine king.

Gaze upon the map,  
Light upon the darkness;  
The keys hang from the belt.

The apex is muddled,  
The stories are scattered,  
But the characters remain,

For the wheel turns  
As Hamlet’s mill grinds.  
In the end, Atlas shrugs.







# Heretic's Corner: Slicing the Gordian Knot

by Michaël de Verteuil

Perhaps that should be “Chopping the Gordian Knot”. In any case, for those of you who are wondering what happened to Heretic's Corner in the last issue of *Hermes' Portal*, the column was assumed by Jérémy Provost's article on a new Character Sheet. So this in fact is the 12th article in the series, the first having been published in the last issue of *Mythic Perspectives*. This instalment, on combat, is one many of you have been waiting for for too long, perhaps, as it may come too late to have any impact on ArM5 which should be in the last stages of playtesting as you read this. Nevertheless, I still think the subject merits being kicked around, particularly as combat is the single weakest feature of ArM4. Besides, this heretic needs something to write about until the new edition actually gets published.

Heretic's Corner usually begins by trashing the rules it proposes to replace. Where the combat system is concerned, however, this is very much like flagellating the proverbially deceased equine. With the *Ordo Nobilis* revisions, I believe the ArM4 combat

system may be (barely) playable, but it still isn't pretty, elegant or straightforward. So I propose instead to offer a simplified and streamlined substitute. The reader can decide whether this new proposed package meets the column's objectives of simplicity, clarity, realism, and playability, and harmonizes well with the rest of the game rules and system.

Combat is inherently complicated but, unlike magic, we all have (or claim to have) some idea of how it actually works (or should work). As the magic in *Ars* is essentially fictional, we can freely develop simplifying assumptions, and then claim without fear of contradiction from realists and simulationists that these assumptions fully reflect the underlying (fictional) reality of magic in Mythic Europe. We can't do this with combat, however, as combat actually existed outside of a fictional game context. All this to say that the simplifying assumptions presented in this article are “simplifying” assumptions, not attempts to simulate in every detail the underlying (authentic) reality of combat in medieval Europe. That said, the reader will also find a list of optional add-ons offered for those who like more spice with their combat. These add-ons are not meant to be comprehensive. Rather, they are guidelines on how this proposed system can be made more simulationist while respecting its underlying simplicity.

**The Combat Roll:** The basic approach to hand-to-hand combat is simple and follows the standard game mechanic for a contest of Abilities. The players representing both opponents roll a stress die and add their respective Weapon Skill + Weapon Combat Bonus + Qik. If you are facing multiple opponents in a round, you still get only one roll, which you apply, defensively to all opponents, and offensively to your designated target. Note that a character engaged in combat and able to defend himself and take measures to avoid being hit still gets a roll, even if he is not actually in a position to hit his opponent for whatever reason. If you win your roll in this case, you don't get hit, but then neither does your opponent.

**Damage:** The winner of the contest (assuming the modified rolls are not tied) then adds the difference between both Combat Rolls to Weapon Damage Bonus + Str, and compares it to the opposing Soak (which remains as currently defined in the ArM4 and *Ordo Nobilis* rules). For every five points of damage, a Body level is inflicted. Any additional carryover is lost (note that carryover from the Combat Rolls has already been applied to Damage). Also note that there are no minimum Strength requirements for weapons anymore under this proposed system. Bonuses for magical or unusually high quality weapons should normally apply only to Damage and not to the Combat Rolls themselves.

In essence, that's it. Table A provides a list of consolidated Skills and revised Bonuses for weapons commonly used in the 13th century. Note that virtually all hand-held weapons have been consolidated into one Skill: Weapon. If used two-handed, the weapons listed under Weapon Skill receive an addi-

Table A

| Skill (Weapon)  | Combat | Damage | Effective Range     | Cost                       |
|-----------------|--------|--------|---------------------|----------------------------|
| <b>Brawling</b> |        |        |                     |                            |
| fist/kick       | 0      | +1     | Touch               | free                       |
| rock*/gauntlet  | 0      | +1     | Touch               | inexpensive                |
| knife*/sap      | +1     | +2     | Touch               | inexpensive                |
| dagger          | +1     | +3     | Touch               | inexpensive                |
| <b>Weapon</b>   |        |        |                     |                            |
| club*           | +1     | +2     | Reach               | inexpensive                |
| spear*          | +2     | +3     | Reach/<br>Contact** | inexpensive/<br>standard** |
| axe*            | +2     | +4     | Reach               | standard                   |
| mace            | +2     | +5     | Reach               | standard                   |
| sword           | +3     | +5     | Reach               | standard                   |
| morning star    | +1     | +7     | Reach               | standard                   |
| <b>Sling</b>    |        |        |                     |                            |
| hand sling      | +1     | +3     | Far                 | inexpensive                |
| pole sling      | +2     | +3     | Far                 | standard                   |
| <b>Bow</b>      |        |        |                     |                            |
| short bow       | 0      | +4     | Far                 | standard                   |
| composite bow   | +1     | +9     | Far                 | expensive                  |
| <b>Crossbow</b> |        |        |                     |                            |
| light crossbow  | +2     | +10    | Far                 | expensive                  |
| heavy crossbow  | +2     | +12    | Far                 | expensive                  |

\* Can be thrown for standard Combat and Damage ratings.

\*\* Pole arm or lance.

tional +1 on Combat and +2 on Damage. Special two-handed versions of each of these exist, but these specialized weapons cannot be used one-handed or thrown. Instead they have additional +2/+4 bonuses rather than +1/+2 and a higher expense rating (inexpensive to standard, standard to expensive). The lance (essentially a two-handed spear) is a special case as it is used one-handed from horseback, gaining yet an additional + on Damage from the Str and Siz of the horse when charging. On foot it counts as a pike, i.e. a two-handed spear with the standard additional +2/+4. All pole arms, i.e. specifically designed two-handed spears, have an effective range of Contact.

But wait! What about Encumbrance, Initiative, Fatigue, Dex and shields?

**Encumbrance:** There isn't any. Well, actually there is. If you are holding your armour rolled and bundled up under your arm while fighting, feel free to add the indicated Encumbrance to your Combat Roll. Based on the contemporary experience of those who actually try physically to simulate fighting in armour, and after a careful search of the historical record, I can only come to the conclusion that except in very limited circumstances encumbrance due to weapons and armour does not negatively affect your ability to fight toe-to-toe. Note that I am referring to weapons and armour properly designed to this end. Improvised armour consisting of multiple layers, or of bulky objects strapped to your chest, would effectively encumber you. But when does this really occur? Encumbrance from armour and weapons does greatly affect your speed if you are running, and your ability to perform athletic feats (though probably less than some people imagine). It is also quite tiring. But that's pretty much it, though you might consider applying armour Encumbrance penalties (at full value, not 1/3 as in *Ordo Nobilis*) to archery Combat as well as to Fatigue Rolls.

**Initiative:** Under this proposed simplified system, Initiative is not rolled for and only matters in determining at which of the three ranges (contact, reach, and touch) combat is taking place. Note that these ranges are not the same as those described in the ArM4 combat rules. Contact is within range of a lance or pole arm. Reach is within normal range of a sword or spear. Touch is close enough for the opponents to be actually grappling with one another. In principle, the combatant with the longer-range weapon (as determined by these three categories) has the initial Initiative. If the weapons are equivalent, the combatant with the highest Quickness + Weapon or Brawl Skill (as appropriate) has the initial Initiative. If all else fails, initial Initiative lies with the one trying to get closest. After the first round, Initiative is accorded to whoever won the previous Combat Roll. Table B indicates the penalties for fighting outside of your effective range. Note that you can only have the Initiative with respect to one opponent at one time if you are fighting multiple opponents. The others invariably have the Initiative on you.

| Table B         |              |           |         |
|-----------------|--------------|-----------|---------|
| Effective range | Actual range |           |         |
|                 | Touch        | Reach     | Contact |
| Touch           | 0            | NA        | NA      |
| Reach           | -3 Combat    | 0         | NA      |
| Contact         | -6 Combat    | -3 Combat | 0       |

**Fatigue:** It should play a role, but hardly anyone thinks that a Fatigue Roll each round of combat is the way to go. Aside from the compulsory Fatigue Roll on a natural Combat Roll of 0 described in *Ordo Nobilis*, the optional add-ons provided at the end of this article suggest two more ways in which Fatigue can be gained.

**Dexterity:** In ArM4, Dexterity is used as the modifier for your Attack score whereas Quickness is used for Defence. For the purposes of simplification, and given that there is now only one Combat score, we should only use one Characteristic as a modifier. Very exceptional circumstances aside (such as an executioner trying to chop off with one blow the head of a prone victim whose neck is on the block), fine manual dexterity doesn't really come into play in combat. Have you ever tried to pick up a penny with a mailed glove? I know Dexterity is also supposed to include basic hand-eye coordination, but I am reasonably confident that Quickness, representing agility, comes into play in combat more often. Note, however, that Dexterity should be a factor in archery. But more on that later.

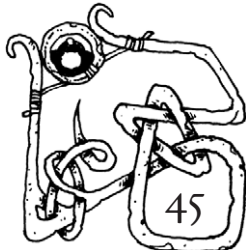
**Shields:** Defence can be understood, and is simulated in roll playing games, in one of two ways: either as a reduced probability of being hit, or in a reduction in the damage suffered. In ArM4, shields and weapons do the former while armour does the latter. This just begs for simplification and the recognition that shields are a form of armour. This is the route adopted here. As for weapons, their defense modifiers have been subsumed in a comprehensive Combat rating. Table C indicates how much each type of shield adds to Soak. A common sense approach can cover cases, such as being attacked from the rear, where a shield would not contribute to Soak.

| Table C    |      |           |
|------------|------|-----------|
| Shield     | Soak | Cost      |
| round      | +2   | standard  |
| kite/tower | +3   | expensive |

To complete our picture, let's look at a few more features that will round off the basic system.

**Brawling:** When you don't have a weapon, but must dodge a blow, this is what you use for your Combat Roll. If you do have a weapon, but your modified Brawling score would be higher (and you don't care about hitting your opponent), feel free to use Brawling instead. Otherwise, Brawling is used as described in the ArM4 rules.

**Quarterstaff:** ArM just can't seem to get this right. It should be intuitively obvious that a quarterstaff is merely a spear without a pointy end, but







apparently this wasn't obvious enough for past editions. Under the rules proposed here, all the weapons (including spear) listed under Single Weapon can be used two-handed for an extra +1 to Combat and +2 to Damage. Since a quarterstaff doesn't have a pointy bit, it is +3 to Combat and +0 to Damage instead of a normal spear's net +3/+3 when used two-handed.

**Archery:** Like the wearing of armour, combat archery is poorly understood. Players tend to assume that it always or usually involves sniping at opposing targets and have been deluded by modern archery contests and medieval reports that a longbow can slay at 200 meters into thinking that medieval bows can be shot accurately at that range. ArM4 inexplicably treats bows like guns. You just aim, use keen eyesight (Per), and fire. Bang! Or swish! Or whatever! You get my point (figuratively). In fact, if you are an archer and sniping on the battlefield, you had better get ready to run because if you miss or fail to bring down your target, he is close enough to come after you.

Long (i.e. Far) range use of combat archery and slings is practised in volleys. A bunch of archers or slingers takes general aim at an enemy formation (preferably of closely packed unarmoured opponents). Some of the arrows or stones hit, some miss. At these distances you don't need keen eyesight, and the keenest Perception will not compensate for drift caused by wind or minor irregularities in the shape of the arrow or sling. It's all a question of Dexterity. For archery purposes, substitute Dexterity for Perception, change the base Ease Factor from 6+ to 12+ for volleys, and be prepared to give generous modifiers for hitting a random target if the defenders are in close ranks or tightly bunched. If some of the defenders are sheltering behind rocks, trees, fortifications or the like, just modify their Soak accordingly. Otherwise, ignore all the modifiers for range, dodging, aiming etc. If a target is hit, Damage is equal to [the margin of success over the Ease Factor + Weapon Damage Bonus + Str]. You can add Str even for crossbows. The stronger you are, the tighter you can wind the crossbow and the more powerful a crossbow you can use.

Sniping is a bit different and only occurs at Near range. It can involve any missile, including thrown knives, axes, spears or rocks. If you know the missile is coming, you can dodge using Brawling (there is no point in dodging a volley except to run for shelter). Otherwise, or if your Brawling is really pathetic and you decline to use it, the base Ease Factor for the sniping archer, slinger or thrower is 6+.

For rate of fire, use the Combat score (without the die roll), as Initiative scores don't exist anymore. Oh, and leave those longbows in the 14th century where they belong. And if you don't and really must have them, for reality's sake (if not mine) ignore the silly "exploding, armour piercing longbow arrow or crossbow bolt head" optional rule in ArM4.

**Fighting from Horseback:** This is spelled out in Ordo Nobilis but merits repeating. When fighting

from horseback you use the lower of your relevant Weapon or Ride Skill. And yes, you can brawl from horseback. You can either attack yourself or, with a successful Ride roll, have your steed kick, bite or knock down an opponent (usually through charging, though this is often done in a melee by spinning the warhorse in place). If there is an available prone or supine target on the ground, however, you can, with a successful Ride roll, both attack another (standing or riding) target yourself while having your horse trample the unfortunate.

That pretty well covers all the basics. Here are some optional goodies for those for whom the basics are never enough.

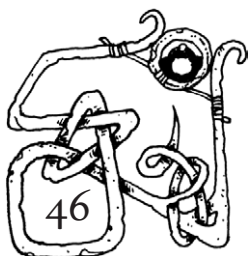
**Botches** (optional): As a general rule, hand-to-hand fighting should involve at least three Botch dice, and even more if fighting in the dark, in the rain or on slippery or broken terrain. As a single botch, I would normally assign a Fatigue level, a dropped weapon or a smashed shield. On a double botch, you might fall to the ground and remain prone or supine until you can get up with a successful Brawling attack. On a triple botch, you might do 15+ (soakable) Damage, with the appropriate Weapon and Str Damage modifiers, to yourself or a comrade. In a quadruple botch, you normally simply kill yourself or, if the storyguide is particularly cruel and an appropriate target is within range, kill an NPC dearest to you or critical to the success of your adventure. You can use these as guidelines.

**Fatigue** (optional): Besides Botches, and the Fatigue checks on a natural Combat Roll of 0 (suggested in Ordo Nobilis), here is another interesting idea for how to simulate fatigue in combat. Let a character suffering damage substitute two Fatigue levels (if he has at least two left) for the first Body level he would otherwise have had inflicted on him as a result of a given blow. (Warning! This is a last minute suggestion and has not been playtested.)

**Full Attack** (optional): A character confident or desperate enough in a given round can declare a Full Attack, in which case both combatants can add +3 to their Damage score that round if successful. If both declare a Full Attack, the winner adds +6 (which can get very ugly!). Note that this is a great tactic to use if you grossly outnumber an opponent, as you and most of your berserk comrades will get the +3 if successful while your victim can only get it against one of you.

**Full Defence** (optional): If you have announced this tactic for the round, you can subtract 3 from your opponents' Damage Score, but may not yourself damage any of your opponents that round. This may be a good tactic to use when grossly outnumbered and desperately hoping for your comrades to rescue you.

**Simultaneous Damage** (optional): You might have lost or tied the Combat Roll, but even with a 0 or negative carryover (assuming there is no Botch involved), your Damage score is still enough to overcome your opponent's Soak. If you use this optional



rule, both of you can hit and even kill each other simultaneously. How fun! It also makes magical weapons and those with high Damage bonuses far more deadly.

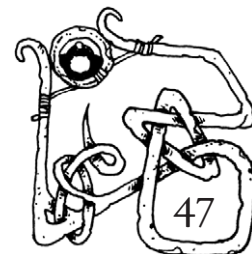
**Striking from Above** (optional): Levered and chain weapons with a weighted end, such as a mace, morning star or even a club, do an additional +3 Damage when used from above, such as from horseback, a castle wall, or a steep incline. Simply being a bit taller than your opponent should not qualify unless you have a 2+ Size advantage...

**Size and Extra-Large or Small Weapons** (optional): The Damage modifiers given for each weapon are meant to apply to those designed for use by Size 0 characters. If your Size is greater and your weapon is appropriately larger, you can add up to your Size score to Damage. Giants, for example, would typically do this though they could normally only afford extra large clubs. (All that extra steel for

an extra large mace can cost a lot of treasure.) You might also want to consider corresponding Damage penalties for weapons designed for little folk, and assign a -2 penalty per Size difference for use of weapons designed to be too big for a particular character's Size.

**Perception for Archery** (optional): Yeah, yeah, I know. We have already established that keen eyesight is no real help in archery. But what about unusually poor eyesight? Add a character's Perception score if it is negative to his archery Combat Roll.

So that's it for this issue. Being all too frequently in want of repose, I am still open to substitute and amateur heretics wanting to fill in for an issue or two. So if you have a simplifying or streamlining idea, just let Eric and me know, and we will even help you write it up and let you walk away with all the credit. We are that nice. 'Til next time, then.







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